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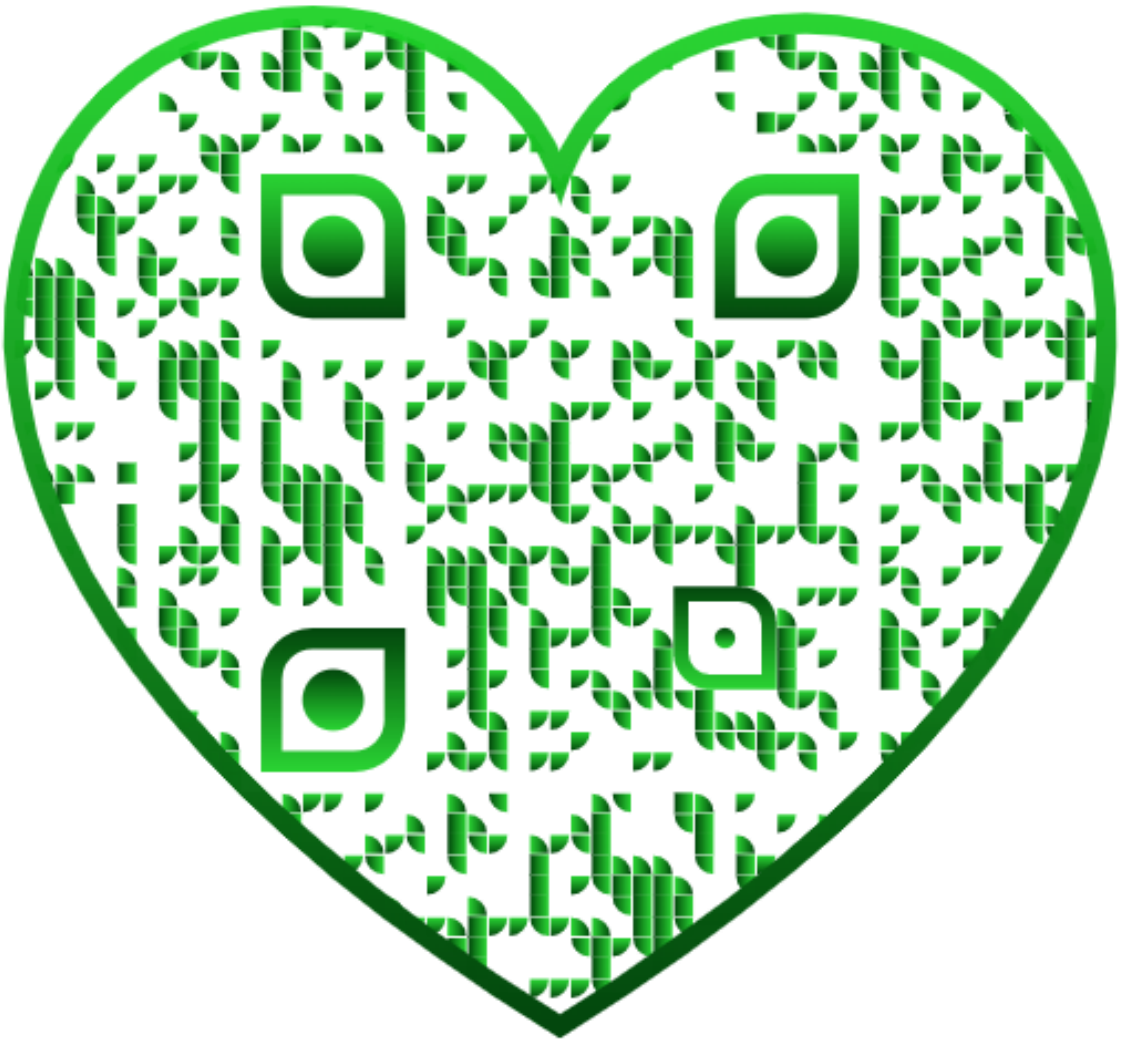

BEHEMOTH
WAGE WAR ON THE MAINSTREAM

LAMB OF GOD
AAA ON THEIR TOUR WITH SLAYER

METAL HAMMER

82 REVIEWS
IRON MAIDEN, SLASH, SOULFLY & ALL THE NEW MUSIC YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT

NIGHTWISH
INSIDE THEIR BLOODSTOCK SUPERSHOW

CLUTCH
SNAKES, FUNK & FLESH-EATING LAWYERS

BEARTOOTH
COME BACK FROM THE BRINK

BURNED OUT. BROKEN. A FUTURE IN TURMOIL

WITHIN TEMPTATION

REBUILDING METAL'S NEXT MEGASTARS

METAL'S LOST GENERATION
PITCHSHIFTER, EARTHTONE9 + MORE ON A FORGOTTEN ERA

PLUS
ZEAL & ARDOR
DEATH
BLACK PEAKS
MESHUGGAH
SAXON
VENOM PRISON
ANAAL NATHRAKH
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FUTURE
ISSUE 314

behemoth

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GOING UNDERGROUND

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Oxbow, Sadistic Intent and Broken Hope rage onstage.

40

LAMB OF GOD

Backstage with the Pure American Metallers on Slayer's farewell tour

THE FUTURE IS HERE

For the first time ever, we're delighted to welcome Within Temptation to the cover of *Metal Hammer*. It's been a long time coming for a band who have steadily but surely become one of metal's most important names and, armed with an explosive, futuristic new record, the world is very much theirs for the taking. *Resist* didn't come without a little turbulence along the way, though. Head to page 30 to find out why we're lucky to still have Within Temptation with us at all.

We also go AAA at Nightwish's Bloodstock spectacular, hang with Lamb Of God during their Slayer tour, ask how Behemoth went about trying to top *The Satanist*, celebrate the life and legacy of a death metal icon in Chuck Schuldiner and talk to some mainstays of the 90s Brit metal scene. There are also brand new interviews with the likes of Saxon, Beartooth, Zeal & Ardor, Anaal Nathrakh, Pig Destroyer, The Amity Affliction, Black Peaks… look, just dig in, alright? As always, whatever your tastes, if it's heavy, we've got your back.

On a more sombre note, this issue of *Hammer* is dedicated to Jill Janus. If you think you see someone you know struggling, please reach out to them. And if you're struggling yourself, know that there is always someone to talk to, and believe me when I say you are not alone in whatever you are going through right now. Look after each other, and…

KEEP IT HEAVY

EDITÖR

If you need to talk to someone, call Samaritans on 116 123

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WITHIN TEMPTATION

We fly to Amsterdam to catch up with the symphonic legends. They've been to Hell and back, but now they're entering a brave new future…

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CLUTCH

What the fuck are their new songs about? Neil Fallon and Jean-Paul Gaster read from *Book Of Bad Decisions*.

50

BEHEMOTH

Lock up your *Bibles* – Nergal and co are on the rampage with their most anti-Christian album yet.

SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE
HEAD TO PAGE 28 FOR MORE DETAILS

NIGHTWISH

Where are Nightwish heading next? We go backstage at their Bloodstock headliner to find out.

REVIEWS

26 COOL SHIT
Satan belch up a brilliant box set, plus black metal colouring books, a Harley Quinn wallet, Peter Steele t-shirt and a host of other truly diabolical delights.

84 ALBUMS
Slash, Coheed And Cambria, Alter Bridge, Black Peaks, The Black Queen, High On Fire and more get probed and prodded on the *Hammer* slab.

100 LIVES
Judas Priest, Gojira, Within Temptation and Watain barrel though Bloodstock, Iron Maiden bedazzle The O2 arena and more!

JILL JANUS

1975-2018

JEREMY SAFFER

JOEL BIRCH

THE AMITY AFFLICTION

The Aussies are throwing caution to the wind for album six – and it could cost them everything

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

AUSSIE METALCORE HEAVYWEIGHTS

The Amity Affliction have seen their blend of metalcore riffs and super-syrupy hooks make them one of their country's biggest metal exports – so why have they drastically switched up the formula for new album *Misery*? We caught up with vocalist Joel Birch to find out why the band are mixing things up on album number six, what caused a sudden line-up change and what our scene can do better to support each other when it comes to mental health.

MISERY FEELS LIKE A NEW DIRECTION FOR YOU. WHY DID YOU FEEL YOU NEEDED TO SWITCH THINGS UP?

"We've done the same music for so long. For 14 years we've been playing a revised version of each album before it and we just thought it was time for a change. I don't think we could have gone on much longer making the same music, to be honest. I don't feel like we'd be being true to ourselves if we didn't make the change."

SO YOU COULD SAY THIS ALBUM IS PIVOTAL FOR YOU...

"It's very important. We're at a point where our lives actually depend on this and it's pretty stressful but it's also extremely exciting. For me, it feels like the most exciting record that we've ever done, aside from maybe going into *Youngbloods*. It's a really different sound and it's the beginning of a new direction and a new chapter, and hopefully it works...or we're fucked. Ha ha ha!"

"IF THIS DOESN'T WORK, WE'RE FUCKED"

ARE YOU PREPARED FOR ANY POTENTIAL BACKLASH YOU MIGHT GET FOR CHANGING YOUR SOUND?

"The comforting thing about releasing [first *Misery* single] *Feels Like I'm Dying*, like we just did, is that it's the craziest song on the record by a country mile. Putting that out and seeing that the backlash wasn't actually that bad was very nice. I think bands have had a much harder time than we have after putting out new music."

DRUMMER RYAN BURT RECENTLY LEFT AMITY TO FOCUS ON HIS MENTAL HEALTH. WHAT IMPACT DID THAT HAVE ON THE REST OF THE BAND?

"It really wasn't working out and he really hated touring. He was terrified of going out on tour. I really felt for him because I've obviously got my own shit. He wasn't getting any sleep, he was stressed out about everything, then the next tour we did overseas with him you could tell his heart wasn't in it. It was for the best for him and for us. We'd already discussed this dynamic shift in our music and we really needed everyone in the band to be 100% on it. It wasn't a shock to him when the conversation was brought up."

YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN VERY VOCAL ABOUT YOUR OWN STRUGGLES WITH DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY. HOW ARE YOU FEELING NOW?

"I've recently been diagnosed with bipolar. I feel like it's become semi-acceptable to have depression or anxiety, but if you've got bipolar then you're a real crazy person. When I got diagnosed I was like, 'Fuck I am proper crazy.' That's a stigma I've held within myself that I wasn't even aware of so I've had to readdress the way I think of things."

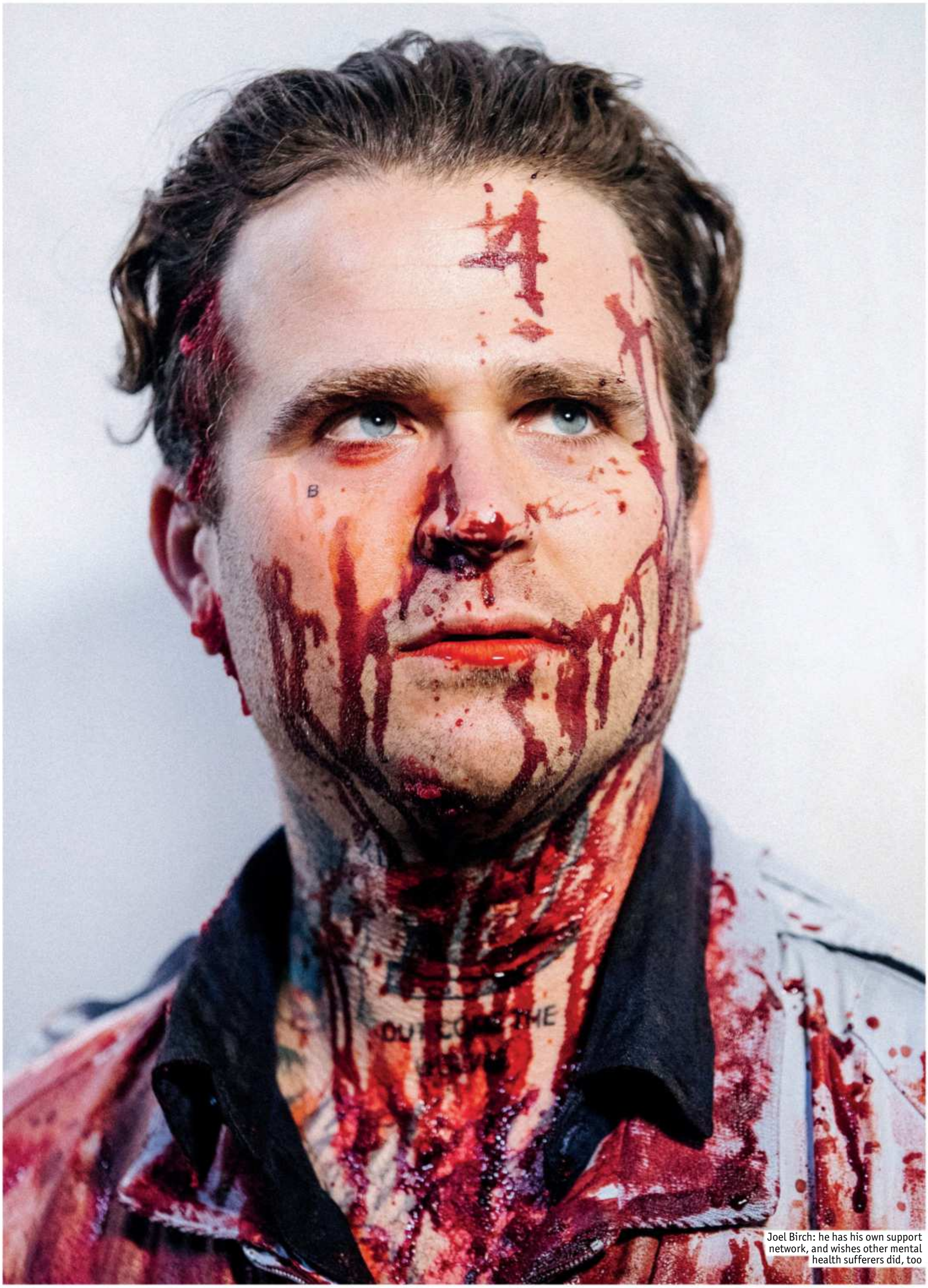
DO YOU FEEL LIKE METAL ISN'T DEALING WITH MENTAL HEALTH WITHIN OUR SCENE VERY WELL?

"I'm fortunate that everyone around me is highly aware of my mental state so I have a really solid support network. But I worry about other bands out there that, say, have one out of five members that's suffering from depression. Bands are out there for fucking six to nine months a year, away from home, away from a proper routine, and routine is something that can really help people's mental health. But people are drawn to music as an outlet so you get all these hurt people out there, touring the world and putting themselves in a situation that is detrimental to their health. Then you get record labels and management pushing these people to their wits' end. I think that's something that gets glossed over. If someone is leaving their support network at home, then the band needs to become the support network. And I don't think that's difficult. It's uncomfortable, but not difficult."

WHAT DO YOU THINK CAN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY DO BETTER?

"The answer is a long and sustained campaign to educate people who aren't depressed about what people who are depressed are going through. People need to be given the tools to empathise with people. There's just nothing out there to explain it to people. Change is going to happen, but it's slow. We're at the beginning, it's positive and we just need to make sure it keeps going and just becomes a part of life in the music industry. It's a discussion that needs to be had."

***MISERY* IS OUT NOW VIA ROADRUNNER**



Joel Birch: he has his own support network, and wishes other mental health sufferers did, too

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

ARCTANGENT

Meshuggah are headlining ArcTanGent in 2019!
We catch up with Tomas Haake to get the exclusive reveal on what to expect

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

IT'S SAFE TO say there has never been a bigger ArcTanGent headliner than Meshuggah. In terms of size and of sheer sonic power, the Swedish tech-metal maniacs dwarf even the most sizable bands of the festival's history. It's quite a coup for the ever-growing event for fans of progressively minded and technical music, and a long-deserved reward for the continued brilliance of one of our world's most unique acts. We spoke to drummer Tomas Haake about what might go down.

SO, TOMAS, WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT ARCTANGENT FESTIVAL?
"I know we're playing it, but it's a new name to me… that's about it, I'm afraid."

WELL, IT FEELS LIKE THE PERFECT FIT FOR MESHUGGAH, A HOMEGROWN, GRASSROOTS FESTIVAL MADE UP OF VERY TECHNICAL AND FORWARD-THINKING BANDS… MANY OF WHOM ARE PROBABLY HUGELY INFLUENCED BY YOU!
"Wow! Obviously, we've done a lot of festivals all over the world, and there are a lot of mixed bills, which is cool, but there is something very exciting about a bill made up just for the fans of one type of music and really celebrating that. You don't want to just do the metal festivals forever, do you? Also, it's a smaller festival, isn't it? That's cool. We do a lot of the huge mammoth-festival bills, but some of the best ones are when they're created with that kind of love on a smaller scale."

IT'S YOUR FIRST FESTIVAL HEADLINE SHOW HERE IN THE UK. IS THAT SATISFYING FOR YOU AFTER SO LONG?
"Yeah, it is. Our first festival headline show in the UK is a big deal. It's always something you strive for – every band wants to be a headline band. You come up from doing support slots to headlining your own show, that's one thing, but to be able to do that at a festival is something very satisfying. It's certainly a feather in the cap for us, no doubt."

WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM THE SHOW, ANYTHING SPECIAL?
"Well, we've never been the sort of band that has wanted to travel with lots of stage props. But we do pay a significant amount of attention to our light show. Our tour that we've been doing this year, we've actually brought the most extreme light show of our career with us – there are so many and they're of such power that even if we're playing outside during the day, you still get a good light show. We'll probably bring something very similar next year."

YOU ALSO HAVE AN INCREDIBLE, ALMOST 3D-LOOKING BACKDROP OUT WITH YOU ON THIS TOUR…
"Yeah, we got really lucky with that, actually. It's not created in any special way, it's just the artwork, the shapes and the colours, they give it that effect like it's alive. It's something we've been playing around with a lot – sometimes on this festival run, playing outdoors, you get a bit of movement on it because of the wind, and that gives it these really crazy visuals."

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVOURITE MEMORIES OF MESHUGGAH FESTIVAL SHOWS FROM OVER THE YEARS?
"My memory is not good when it comes to stuff like that, but we've had some really great festival shows over the years. This year at Hellfest was great even though it was in the sunlight – that's one thing we've tried to avoid as a band these days. We're not as mobile as we used to be, there isn't so much running around, and so now we do rely more on the sound and the visuals in the live show. So, playing in the evening or in a tent suits us more. The UK is actually one of the places that we feel we need to do a definitive festival show! We got cut short at Bloodstock one year because of technical difficulties, I had back problems once at a festival that escapes me now, and we had to have another drummer step in for half of the set for me. So, we are looking to get a festival set over there really right, and if we do it while headlining then all the better."

"SOME OF THE BEST FESTIVALS ARE THOSE CREATED WITH LOVE ON A SMALLER SCALE"

WILL YOU BE PLAYING ANY NEW MATERIAL AT ARCTANGENT?
"In a sense the writing has already started, but there is never a single riff that gets written on tour. We have to put time aside to write our records with a clear schedule. So, unofficially, there have been a few riffs written, but we are starting to sit down in September to write new material. Our aim is to do a few more festival dates next summer and then maybe record next fall. But don't hold your breath – I'd expect it to be late 2020 or early 2021 before the new album comes out. That's the timeline we want to work to, and that's what Nuclear Blast are working to as well."

ANY IDEAS WHAT WILL IT SOUND LIKE?
"Not at all. We don't really discuss that sort of thing, to be honest with you. The music comes out quite organically. We make a point of trying to make each album a little bit different from what came before, so hopefully that will be the case for the new one."

LAST TIME WE SAW YOU GUYS IT WAS AT OUR GOLDEN GODS AWARDS SHOW. WE HOPE YOU HAD A LOVELY TIME!
"Absolutely we did! It was a fun night and we also realised that we need to find a way to start doing three-song-long shows! I don't know if we could make any money doing that, but I hardly broke a sweat. But it was a really fun night. Well done to you!"

FOR MORE ON ARCTANGENT, KEEP YOUR EYES ON WWW.ARCTANGENT.CO.UK AND WWW.METALHAMMER.COM

Meshuggah: the Swedish titans are coming to lay waste to ArcTanGent!

VENOM PRISON

Get ready for one of 2019's most anticipated extreme metal albums

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

THE FACTS

ALBUM:
2

PRODUCER:
Tom Dring

STUDIO:
Vagrant Recordings, Southport

EXPECT:
Another album of wanton, savage, socially motivated death metal/ hardcore

THE SUCCESS OF a young, part-Russian/part-Welsh, part-death metal/ part-hardcore band at the tail end of 2016 was one of the most surprising, yet welcome, events to happen to our scene for some time. After unexpectedly flooring everyone with *Animus*, and the increasingly excellent live shows that accompanied them, Venom Prison now have the unenviable task of having to follow up one of the strongest debut records in memory. We spoke to vocalist Larissa Stupar about just how they plan to top it.

WHAT WAS THE MINDSET IN VENOM PRISON GOING INTO THE RECORDING OF THE NEW ALBUM AFTER THE SUCCESS YOU'VE HAD?

"We felt a bit of pressure, actually. After the success of *Animus* we felt people have real expectation that we have to not just meet, but succeed. We wrote and then scrapped a lot of songs, and this one was definitely harder to write because we spent so long on tour. We didn't have a lot of time to sit down and write; we had to give up a lot of time with family and friends to just go and write the songs and really obsess over getting them right."

Larissa checks the score with bassist Mike Jeffries and producer Tom Dring

WHAT CAN WE EXPECT IT TO SOUND LIKE?

"Ash [Gray, guitar] and Ben [Thomas, guitar] do most of the writing and they realised what they liked and what they would have improved from last time. So we went from there and just tried to write. This album is definitely heavier than *Animus* and it's more experimental and technical, too. There are some electronic bits and some melodic parts that people wouldn't necessarily expect."

WHAT EFFECT HAS PLAYING THOSE BIGGER STAGES LIKE LONDON'S BRIXTON ACADEMY HAD ON YOU?

"I think we realised that people really like breakdowns, so we've tried to put a lot more of them in there! We've got heavier beatdowns and some faster grindcore elements. Just anything to make people start a circle-pit."

WHAT KIND OF LYRICAL THEMES ARE YOU EXPLORING?

"This one is going to be a lot more personal for me, because I've been suffering from depression for the last few years now and I've been going through some really hard times. I just wanted to write down and communicate those feelings. I read somewhere that if you express those thoughts it feels better as you stop carrying it. But I've also written songs about homophobia and transphobia. Basically, the whole record is about suffering, whether it is societal suffering or internal suffering. I wanted to express those feelings."

THERE HAS BEEN SO MUCH FOR YOU TO DRAW ON SINCE THE LAST

"THIS IS GONNA MAKE PEOPLE START CIRCLE-PITS"

Ben Thomas, Larissa Stupar and Ash Gray take a well-earned break

ALBUM CAME OUT. WHAT ELSE HAVE YOU FOCUSED ON?

"One thing that rarely left my mind was the #MeToo movement, in music and especially in Hollywood. I don't know if you remember the case of the girl who was assaulted behind a dumpster in 2016 by [U.S. athlete] Brock Turner, there's a line that was said to the judge in his defence that was something like, 'They're ruining his life just because he had 20 minutes of action.' It was so ridiculous. There's a line in one of the songs that actually references unfair court hearings for rape survivors. We thought it was important for us to set out our stall in *Animus* and then push it a little bit further. I tried to incorporate more femininity into my lyrics, talk about the role of motherhood. It's much more personal but it's very politically minded as well. It's pretty dark."

IS THERE ANY FEAR IN YOU ABOUT HAVING TO GO OUT AND PERFORM THOSE VERY PERSONAL SONGS NIGHT AFTER NIGHT?

"I have mixed feelings about it. I'm very afraid that people will read my lyrics and just go, 'What the fuck is she going through?' and then think that I'm insane or that I'm going to hurt myself. But then on the other hand I think it's very important to release those feelings and let people know that they're not on their own. I think that a lot of people are going to be able to relate to what I say on this record, and that should make them realise that they're not on their own."

LAST TIME WE SPOKE YOU SAID YOU FORESAW A DAY WHEN A GRINDCORE FESTIVAL COULD PULL 80,000 FANS. IS THIS ALBUM GOING TO BRING EXTREME METAL EVEN CLOSER TO THE MAINSTREAM?

"I think we are seeing metal become more and more accepted in normal society. Whether it's genuine or whether it's just to follow a trend I really don't know. But we just toured with Trivium and they are not as extreme as us, and it was often hard for their fans to really understand what we were doing, but I think most of them did dig us!"

THE NEW VENOM PRISON ALBUM WILL LAND NEXT YEAR

Ash and Ben, Venom Prison's six-string heroes, write most of the band's music

Walter lends Ash a helping paw

SAXON

PRINCESS OF THE NIGHT

How did a song about a steam train end up being one of the most influential moments of NWOBHM?

WORDS: MALCOLM DOME • ILLUSTRATION: MARK LEARY

IT WOULD BE easy to take a glance at the title and get the wrong idea of what Saxon's *Princess Of The Night* is all about.

"Well, not every country in the world is into steam trains," laughs vocalist Biff Byford today, as he revisits the song that helped establish Saxon as big players in the New Wave Of British Heavy Metal. "And while people sing along with the chorus, they don't necessarily know all the rest of the lyrics. For instance, in Japan we had to explain what it was all about. I think they had their own theories of what a 'princess of the night' might be..."

The song came to Biff while Saxon were doing the Strong Arm Of The Law tour in 1980.

"I wanted to do a song about a steam train, because that was something I was really into when I was growing up in West Yorkshire. A few of us kids used to go down to the viaduct at night and watch the mail train rumble past. Then in our early days, the band would park our van at Barry Island in Glamorgan, a graveyard for steam trains. We used to try and nick things off of them as well. So, I had it in mind to do a song that would celebrate what was, even by 1980, a bygone era."

However, it took a little while for Biff's initial scribblings on paper to develop into the song Saxon fans know and love today.

"I had the chorus worked out with the melody line, and some of the verses, but it didn't really all come together until Paul Quinn had an idea for the riff. As soon as I heard that, I knew I could make the lyrics I had work with it. I had to rearrange the riff a little to really get it all into place, but once we had that sorted, the rest flowed."

Saxon: the songs have endured better than the fashions

Saxon actually rehearsed the song before recording it without drummer Pete Gill, which led to a slight problem...

"I can't recall why Pete wasn't with us, but we had a guy called Mark Pinder standing in, and he came up with a brilliant idea for the bass drum part in the second verse. But when he heard what Mark had done, Pete wasn't very happy about it at all. We got him to do it in the end."

"YOU CAN TELL METALLICA WERE INFLUENCED BY THIS SONG"

The song was the opening track on 1981's seminal *Denim And Leather* album, and released as a single, reaching number 57 in the UK chart. Over the years, it has become one of the band's most loved and enduring songs.

"We knew when we'd recorded it that this was something special, but what we didn't realise was how much the fans would take it to their hearts," admits Biff. "It's still one of our most popular tunes live. Everyone likes to join in the chorus, and it's become a massive anthem for us."

And when it comes to the metal legends' evergreen live shows, Biff still delights in performing *Princess Of The Night* onstage.

"I never get tired of doing it," he beams. "I've never thought we should drop it from the set because it's becoming a 'bit stale'. There have been times when we've had to leave it out, but that's down to time restrictions, not because we are fed up with playing it."

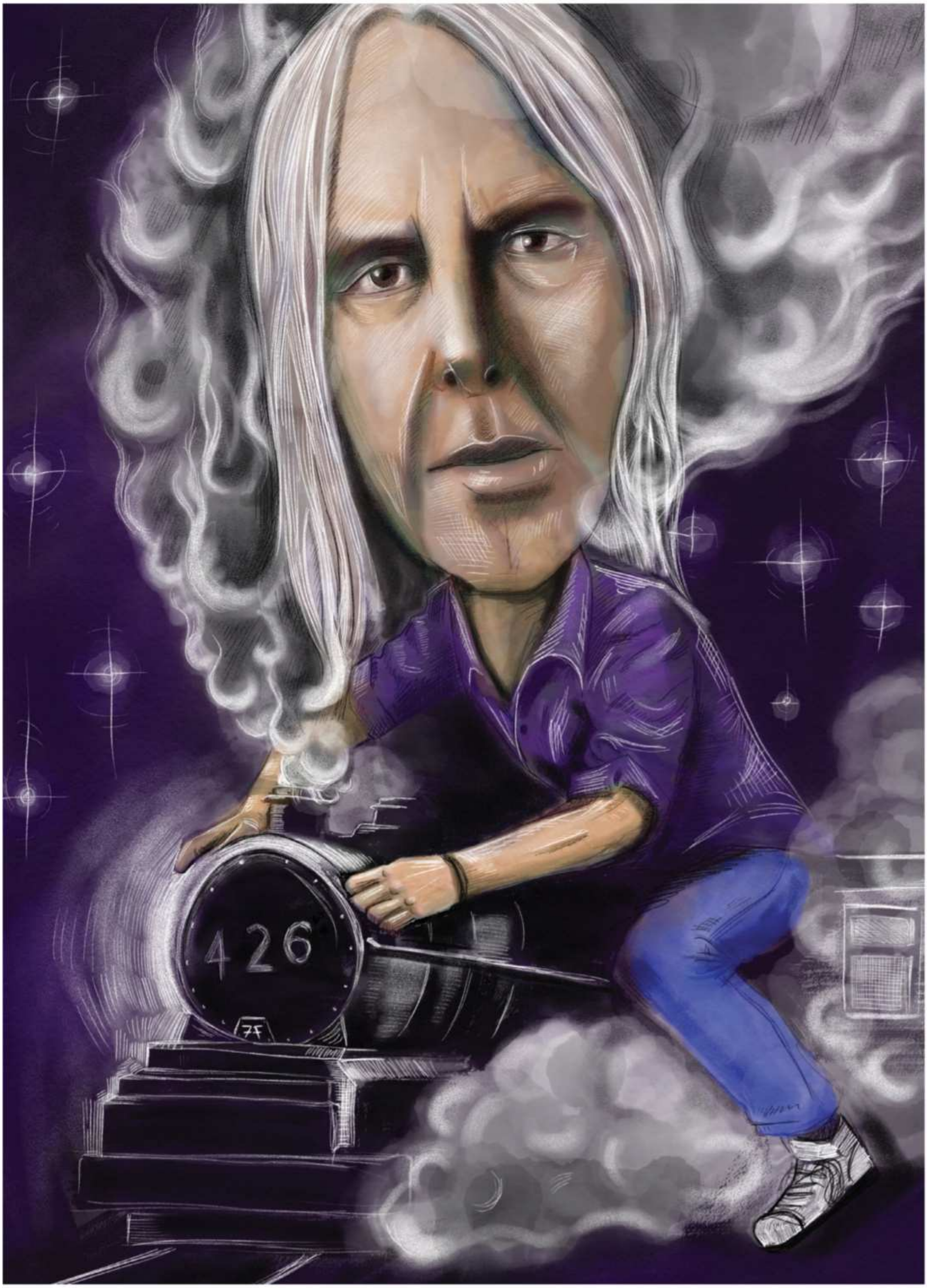
Princess Of The Night and the album that bore it would prove to be hugely influential within the bubbling NWOBHM scene, and the generations of bands that followed in its wake. If you listen to Metallica's *Seek & Destroy* today, you'll hear a guitar solo that's clearly inspired by what was going on on *Princesss*...

"Metallica have always said they've been heavily influenced by Saxon, and you can tell that with *Seek & Destroy*," agrees Biff, before adding with a chuckle: "I wish they'd actually do a version of *Princess Of The Night* – the royalties would be useful! There are hardly any covers of that song, actually. When you consider that it's such a simple, singalong song, that's surprising."

Ultimately, though, Biff is proud that Saxon are still helping to celebrate a bygone era.

"I like to think that whenever the band perform it, we are doing our bit to keep steam trains in fans' minds!" he laughs.

***THUNDERBOLT* IS OUT NOW VIA SILVER LINING MUSIC. SAXON TOUR THE UK IN OCTOBER – SEE P.109**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NEW NOISE

THE BEST NEW BANDS YOU NEED THIS MONTH

RAW IN SECT

Greece's answer to System Of A Down? Raw In Sect might be the most unique young band in metal today

WORDS: ALI COOPER

SOUNDS LIKE:
A big fat Greek metal wedding

FOR FANS OF:
Orphaned Land, Firewind, Rotting Christ

LISTEN TO:
Therion

MARRYING PROGRESSIVE METAL with traditional Greek folk music would be a fitting soundtrack for a modern Greek tragedy. This clash of the titans, however, becomes a reality at the hands of Athenian outfit Raw In Sect, born from frontman Kostas Diamandis's tireless commitment to finding fellow heavily inclined Greek musicians – not an easy task.

"I would go up to random people on the street to find musicians," Kostas recalls. "If I saw a guy with long hair, I'd ask if he played drums. In Greece, the chances are if you find a musician, they're going to be in another band and you won't be their priority. That was tough for us; we always wanted people who have our band as their priority, otherwise it doesn't make any sense."

The band's mission statement – combining the heaviness of metal with the energetic vibes of Greek string – Raw In Sect's unique approach is a result of geographical and musical chaos.

"Greece connects the three continents of Europe, Asia and Africa, so we get musical influences from everywhere," he explains of his country's cultural melting pot. "People say they like metal for its aggressive sound, but some ethnic musical movements from other cultures are even more intense than metal. The challenge is 'commercialising' it for other countries or it gets lost in translation."

"PEOPLE HATE US FOR MESSING WITH SACRED MUSIC"

Raw In Sect's new album, *Kitro*, celebrates the diversity of traditional Greek sounds contrasted with outlandish punk, dynamic rock and assertive metal – but such a fresh mix of styles presents an unusually big risk for the Athens natives.

"People either love us or hate us," admits their singer. "Some say we should not mess with the Greek sound because it's sacred, but if someone tells us to do something, we're going to do the opposite without thinking about it. The bands we like don't change to fit in; if a label told System Of A Down to stop sounding Armenian, they wouldn't be themselves. We'd rather listen to a band

Raw In Sect: metallers of a different stripe

doing a thousand different things than a thousand bands doing the same thing."

With each track title a play on both English and Greek words, the album becomes a bridge between two very different worlds. Lead single *Arena* combines the Greek name Athena, their home city of Athens, and the English term 'arena', as a place of conflict. Together, the track exposes the reality of an ancient city in present day.

"Athens always feels like a struggle and an 'arena', especially in recent years," Kostas explains. "In London, people are nervous about their work and always chasing a deadline, so that's their arena. There are parts of Athens that are very high society and rich but none of us have experience of those areas, so *Arena* is our daily life in the city."

Taking their individuality beyond the familiar borders of Greece has, in many ways, held back Raw In Sect, with the band often turning down opportunities to break the mainstream market purely by following the age-old metal template.

"We've struggled for many years because we're always the outsiders and we never settle for a specific sound," Kostas reveals. "If you're in a subgenre like hardcore, you have a community that helps you get your music out and tour, but when you don't fit in like us, nobody wants to help."

The Herculean challenge of breaking the rest of Europe on their own steam tested the band to their limits, but the reward came as they were finally able to arrive on British shores and play the UK.

"When we tour the UK, British people tell us they love our songs in the Greek language, so I ask them if they understand the lyrics and they say no!" Kostas laughs. "They just like the sound. The language is more…*aggressive*."

***KITRO* IS OUT NOW VIA SECTA**

Austin-based Runescarred are delivering progressive groove metal

RUNESCARRED

Mixing progressive songwriting with heavy metal heroics, these Texans are looking to do the Lone Star State proud

WORDS: MATT MILLS

SOUNDS LIKE:
Undiluted, guitar-fuelled power, with timeless melodies and mind-numbing grooves to boot

FOR FANS OF:
Judas Priest, Iced Earth, Machine Head

LISTEN TO:
This Is Mine

TEXAS HAS LONG been a hotbed for guitar godliness. Whether it's through the vintage blues of Johnny 'Guitar' Wilson, the timeless swagger of Buddy Holly, the gritty rock'n'roll of Billy Gibbons, or the game-changing heavy metal majesty of Dimebag Darrell, there's something in the Lone Star State's water that's made it a breeding ground for six-string sensations. As they ride off of the momentum of their brand new debut EP, *We Are*, Runescarred are already displaying all of the skills necessary to join their homeland's impressive roster – not least because of their impeccable musical education.

"I went to the Berklee College Of Music and I still owe a lot of money to them," smiles the band's lead shredder, Tim Driscoll. The esteemed Boston university has spawned a plethora of lauded aural magicians, from Mike Portnoy and John Petrucci to Steve Vai. "I have an expensive piece of paper that says I know how to play guitar!" he adds with a grin.

"WE'D HOLD OUR OWN WITH JUDAS PRIEST"

"Tim brings a different level of playing to the table," frontman Ven Scott explains. "We stopped being afraid of [working in] progressive elements."

With Tim's college-educated savagery at the forefront, Runescarred dub the music of their new EP "progressive groove metal". The three-song snapshot mightily melds the NWOBHM-like grandeur of harmonic lead guitars and operatic vocals with a fury ignited by guttural rhythms and breakneck pacing.

"The thing I love about rock'n'roll and classic metal is the drama," Ven says of their dynamic approach to songwriting. "Growling and screaming have their place and are a perfect fit for myriad bands but, for me, it's started to get boring. So, with Runescarred, I decided that if the song calls for growls, it'll get them, but, by and large, to tell my stories lyrically, melodies have served me better.

"Plenty of times I will listen to something and go, 'That needs a little more 'Halford','" he continues. "I wouldn't consider us 'old-school', but I think we could definitely hold our own if we were to ever run onstage with Maiden or Priest."

Would they feel comfortable mixing it up with younger bands, too?

"We would fit comfortably on any metal bill that wasn't exclusively Sabbathy, sludgy stuff," Tim enthuses.

Runescarred's increasing arsenal of high-energy and generation-bridging metal anthems gives the quintet an adrenaline-driven edge in the world of heavy prog, as more bands push their songwriting to more expansive realms.

"We're flashy where we need to be," Ven summarises, before Tim likens their streamlined brand of thrashing experimentation to "a prizefighter getting lean and dropping a weight class": "We're more traditionalist compared to something like Periphery or Animals as Leaders," he concludes. "But we're still as intense as anyone else out there today. There are more acoustic parts and it's just as technical."

Providing a quintessentially modern twist on the grandiose bombast of metal's earlier glory, Runescarred effortlessly complement swanky technicality with the inherent excitement of enticing choruses and skull-rattling speed. It's a mix that should see them fly up metal's ranks.

***WE ARE* IS OUT NOW**

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Voivod
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out 28 September on CD & vinyl
The industrial death metal duo follow up 2016's The Whole Of The Law with this terrifying, horrifying yet human new album.

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Taken By The Tide: living life on the dark side

TAKEN BY THE TIDE

Sometimes, the only way to find solace in humanity's horrors is to channel them into the a pummelling, death-tinged racket

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

SOUNDS LIKE:
Furious tech metal that's the stuff of nightmares.

FOR FANS OF:
Converge, The Dillinger Escape Plan, Sikth

LISTEN TO:
Moloch

PEOPLE ARE CAPABLE of doing terrible things to each other. Like many bands before them, that destructive, cruel aspect of human nature is a source of fascination and fury for Nottingham's Taken By The Tide, whose latest EP, *Revenge*, sets our darkest proclivities against abhorrent, slaughterhouse riffs and highly cerebral tech death.

"For me, it's just easier to write about nasty, horrible, real-life stuff. I've never written fantasy lyrics about dungeons and dragons," admits frontman and lyricist Phil Illsley, who wrote the band's recent single, *Moloch*, about "decades of family abuse finally unravelled by dementia." He explains: "My grandma died a couple of years ago. And just before she died, in the last few months she spilled out these horrible things that happened to her when she was younger at the hands of my grandad. I was writing the words to *Moloch* to process this stuff and I remember finishing writing and going to bed at 00.20 at night. I got a call from my mum in the morning saying my grandma died at 00.20. I'm not superstitious, I don't believe in black cats or anything like that, but that was weird set of circumstances. There's no other way round it, it just had to be turned into a song."

Smashing together the harsh spite of Dillinger and Converge's bleak intensity into progressive, Meshuggah-esque transfigurations, drenched in the cold sweat of John Carpenter atmospherics, Taken By The Tide's music is not something you chuck on willy-nilly. The word 'Moloch', for instance, refers to a God associated with child sacrifice, while *The Organs Are Mine* not only has the most intestine-shrivelling title we've heard in ages, but is about Holocaust survival. This is dark stuff.

ALTHOUGH THE BAND'S profile is on the rise, musically their modus operandi remains emphatically and brutally simple. "We're trying to bring something that is genuinely angry," says Phil. "We don't like Donald Trump, we don't like prejudice and we fucking hate Nazis. It all fits in with this theme of revenge. I suppose I'm metaphorically taking revenge on all these injustices.

"You look at bands like Tesseract, now we *love* Tesseract, but the early records, they were pretty aggressive. Now they sound like a dream and the scene has followed that. We're almost going in the opposite direction."

Since their inception that's exactly what the band have done. Over the last eight years and through various line-up shifts, they've released two EPs: 2010's *There Is No Such Thing As An Atheist In A Foxhole* and 2014's *Hands Of Spite*. And while the quartet's sound has matured and they've mastered the technical side of their grand ambitions, one thing hasn't changed at all: that relentless anger that rages with skin-peeling ferocity throughout their music.

"We're inspired by bands like The Dillinger Escape Plan and Sikth and all of that first wave tech metal stuff," says Phil. "Just really awkward-length riffs that don't make sense, that sound like they're stuck together. That's what our very first EP is like – it sounds like early Between The Buried And Me. We sound like a different band now and we've kind of cohered ourselves into something that feels bigger, but we still write really awkward music. It doesn't have to be a particular subgenre as such, it just needs to fit that criteria. This record is polished but it still sounds really, really angry. We're pretty proud of that. I think we feel like we've got that balance right." ✠

"MY GRANDMA DIED AS I FINISHED A SONG ABOUT HER"

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Birds In Row: ready to ruffle some feathers

BIRDS IN ROW

They may be one of metal's most mysterious new bands, but this French hardcore collective's message couldn't ring any clearer

WORDS: LUKE MORTON

SOUNDS LIKE:
Emotionally-driven hardcore with its middle finger in the air

FOR FANS OF:
Touché Amoré, Converge, Modern Life Is War

LISTEN TO:
I Don't Dance

BIRDS IN ROW aren't a band: they're a collective. Despite *Hammer* speaking on the phone to one individual, he's keen to point out that the French trio communicate as one voice and avoid the concept of identities.

"We don't want to be considered as a boyband," he/they say. "We want people to focus on what the band does, not what every member is about. It's a collective effort and there is no one member more important than another."

Forming in 2009, this unit have been moving fast to spread their message of change. Following their first rehearsal, in a month they had a recording, in six months they were playing locally, within a year they were touring Europe. After a string of EPs and a debut album, we're here with second full-length *We Already Lost The World*: a record that's musically and emotionally heavy, always carrying the message of positivity and rebellion that underpins BIR's sound.

"It's a good time to tell people that you don't need to love everyone, but you can respect everyone and work together to try to build something because we can't count on anyone above us," say the band. "We can only rely on people around us – neighbours, friends, people you're involved with on a daily basis – they're the people you should do things with; try to work with people and don't hate them without knowing them.

"Try to be involved in politics, not just by voting, but taking care of people around you. That's the main message behind the punk scene: to try to build something as a community and not expect anything from anyone else."

Living in the small town of Laval in western France, Birds In Row say there isn't much chance to get involved in protests, but they use their music to spread a message of change by putting on their own DIY punk shows.

"Politics isn't all about marching in the streets," they suggest. "It's the conversations you have on a daily basis with people, trying to change minds and giving other options."

This desire for changing the status quo and influencing others to see the world differently forms the backbone of new album *We Already Lost The World*. An emotive, cathartic blast of energy inspired as much by Converge as early 00s screamo, dripping with blood and tears for a world they no longer feel a part of. It sounds like a breakup record, but the band tell us it's more profound and poetic than that.

"In a way it's breaking up with your environment or expectations. You always thought that life could be easier or amazing for different reasons, but then you really discover the world as you're growing up and you discover there's a lot of bullshit and shitty things that happen around you. It puts you in this breakup situation with your expectations from when you were younger."

This disconnect and apathy isn't an alien concept to many people in society who feel like they're on the bottom rung with no means of climbing higher. That feeling is what inspired the rather bleak album title, taken from an imagined conversation BIR had with a man they saw "being an asshole" on a train.

"I came up with this guy saying, 'You don't have to love me, you don't have to hate me, we both lost in this story so let's just do something to get the world back into our hands.' Both of us already lost at this world so we have to build now, which is a positive statement.

"It's not about being bummed out because we don't have everything, we don't have control over most things in our lives – so let's try to take it back."

"POLITICS ISN'T ABOUT MARCHING, IT'S ABOUT CONVERSATION"

***WE ALREADY LOST THE WORLD* IS OUT NOW VIA DEATHWISH**

How do you cram a tech-death juggernaut into 150 seconds? These plucky Scots are keeping it fast and heavy

GODEATER

Godeater: they have beef with cattle farming

WORDS: DOM LAWSON

SOUNDS LIKE:
Mind-bending tech-death with a head full of mad ideas

FOR FANS OF:
The Faceless, Decapitated, Soreption

LISTEN TO:
Exsanguinated

IN AN ERA of relentless sensory bombardment, metal bands need to get their point across quickly and with maximum force. Glasgow's Godeater do all of that and more within new single *Exsanguinated*'s breathless 150 seconds. Following last year's promising *Outerstellar* EP, the new song suggests that this young quartet are rapidly morphing into something special: a technical death metal band with a knack for writing short, exhilarating anthems.

"I've got quite a short attention span so I've always been drawn to quick changes and linear structures," says guitarist Ross Beagan. "The bulk of the writing stage is very natural and spontaneous, building on sections I've already written. Then I refine every detail to ensure that the songs are as concise as possible."

Aside from its elaborate structure and dizzying, quasi-symphonic arrangement, *Exsanguinated* pulls off the additional trick of sounding weirdly original and difficult to pigeonhole. Touches of everything from early Decapitated to latter-day Between The Buried And Me erupt from the absurdly precise mêlée, but Godeater already seem to have conjured their own, subtly eccentric metal substrain. The first song to emerge from the Scots' forthcoming debut album, *Exsanguinated* also marks vocalist Josh Graham's first opportunity to write lyrics for the band he joined last year – and he hasn't wasted the chance to write from the heart.

"When I joined the band, the lyrics for *Outerstellar* had already been written for me," he notes. "The new single is us lashing out at the utter barbarism that takes place in the food industry daily, with regards to cattle farming. We know it's a finite industry and we know the environmental impact it's having, and yet nothing changes because those who run it make too much money from it. It's a shortsighted and selfish worldview to have and it disgusts us."

"I HAVE A SHORT ATTENTION SPAN!"

Godeater seem to be relishing the limitless possibilities facilitated by their open-minded approach to being brutal. As Josh explains, it's possible to stick to the death metal script without merely repeating other people's ideas.

"I think we take cues from the likes of Deafheaven on that front," he says. "They are taking black metal to new places without necessarily saying 'We are the future of this genre.' I'd say that's how we want to approach death metal. I'll never not want to hear horrible, filthy, buzzsaw guitar riffs but we want to do things with the genre that maybe haven't been explored before."

"It's technical death metal but without limits," adds Ross. "We crossover styles, it really gives us a lot of room to be progressive and shape our sound."

With British death metal getting more attention than at any point since the 90s, bands as meticulous and talented as Godeater deserve to rise swiftly to the top of the pile.

"*Exsanguinated* is just the start of a change in our sound," Ross concludes. "The new album tracks are more refined, more varied and more textured."

"Lyrically there's a definite thematic continuation from *Exsanguinated* in places," adds Josh, "but it's already sounding pretty diverse and I can't give too much away yet!" ✠

***EXSANGUINATED* IS OUT NOW VIA GODEATERUK.BANDCAMP.COM**

I, The Mapmaker: Searching... for hidden meanings

I, THE MAPMAKER

Think concept albums are always style over substance? These Bournemouth punks are ripping up the rulebook

WORDS: MATT MILLS

SOUNDS LIKE:
The melody and technicality of Architects, delivered in the dissonant tones of Converge

FOR FANS OF:
Palm Reader, Knocked Loose, Holding Absence

LISTEN TO:
Capsized

"IT ALL STEMMED from the fact that I used to be a lifeguard for a while," begins I, The Mapmaker frontman Ash Emery, detailing the origins of the band's story-driven take on melodic metalcore.

"During the winter period, you'd have either one person swimming up and down, or no one. You'd overthink things and drive yourself into a little bit of a hole, so I wanted something to distract myself while I was watching this person swim for hours. So I just had this concept flesh out in my head. I started writing songs about it, but also about things that meant a lot to me personally, like the passing of my nan, being diagnosed with certain things and losing friends."

While other concept-driven metal mavens such as Coheed And Cambria use their narrative-weaving tunes to tell of epic myths and fantastical landscapes, I, The Mapmaker are the unabashedly gritty and nihilistic alternative. On their ferocious debut EP, *Searching*, the South Coast-based quintet present songs that Ash describes as "double-written": individually, they cover such real-world topics as loss and abuse, but together, the hardcore anthems unite to tell the mysterious tale of a despondent and insane protagonist, wrestling with the deaths of his wife and child.

"The pitfall with concept albums is that there's an [assumption] about them: 'I don't want to listen to songs about dragons and stuff like that. I want sadness and emotion, from the heart.' We've not come out yet and gone, 'This is what happens – this, this and that,' so it's nice that we can add a bit of depth if people want it. They can just take us as another hardcore band if they want songs to listen to. But if they scratch a little bit deeper, there is this new, hidden meaning. If you don't know the concept, you can still take your own thing from it."

Ash describes *Searching*'s narrative a emanating "from a dark part of the human condition," with the lament of its lyrics complemented by I, The Mapmaker's unpredictable music. Such riotous cuts as *Disbelief* and *Capsized* wholeheartedly reject the standard verse–chorus–verse–chorus format, favouring a manic and avant-garde approach that can shift from angry and impactful to clean and sombre, on the head of a pin.

"It fits the melodic hardcore scene, but it gets progressive at some points," Ash says of his band's aural prowess. "It's emotional and raw, but you've also got that energy and a very aggressive side. We all love the subgenre of hardcore and it suited what we wanted to do."

I, The Mapmaker are currently shining stars in the South's explosive metalcore movement: a sect that has also spawned such international favourites as Bury Tomorrow. As their genre evolves thanks to pioneers like Holding Absence and Loathe, the newcomers' uncompromising and visceral experimentation spells out a very bright future.

***SEARCHING* IS OUT NOW**

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DEATHFLUX

Describing themselves as 'dystopian metal', this Nottingham six-piece deal in breakneck, groove-laden noise that fans of Meshuggah, Fear Factory and Beneath The Massacre will certainly appreciate.

LISTEN TO: *Consume*

LOWLIVES

AKA What Stitch From The Defiled Did Next. Less synth-powered industrial metal racket, more gritty, grunged-up punk rock – but the unmistakable screeches of Stitch (now known as Lee Villain) lend it a heavier backbone.

LISTEN TO: *Thieves*

FROM INSIDE

Shiny metalcore with smatterings of electronica sprinkled over for good measure, From Inside channel the likes of The Amity Affliction and Blessthefall into their super-catchy jams.

LISTEN TO: *Before I Leave*

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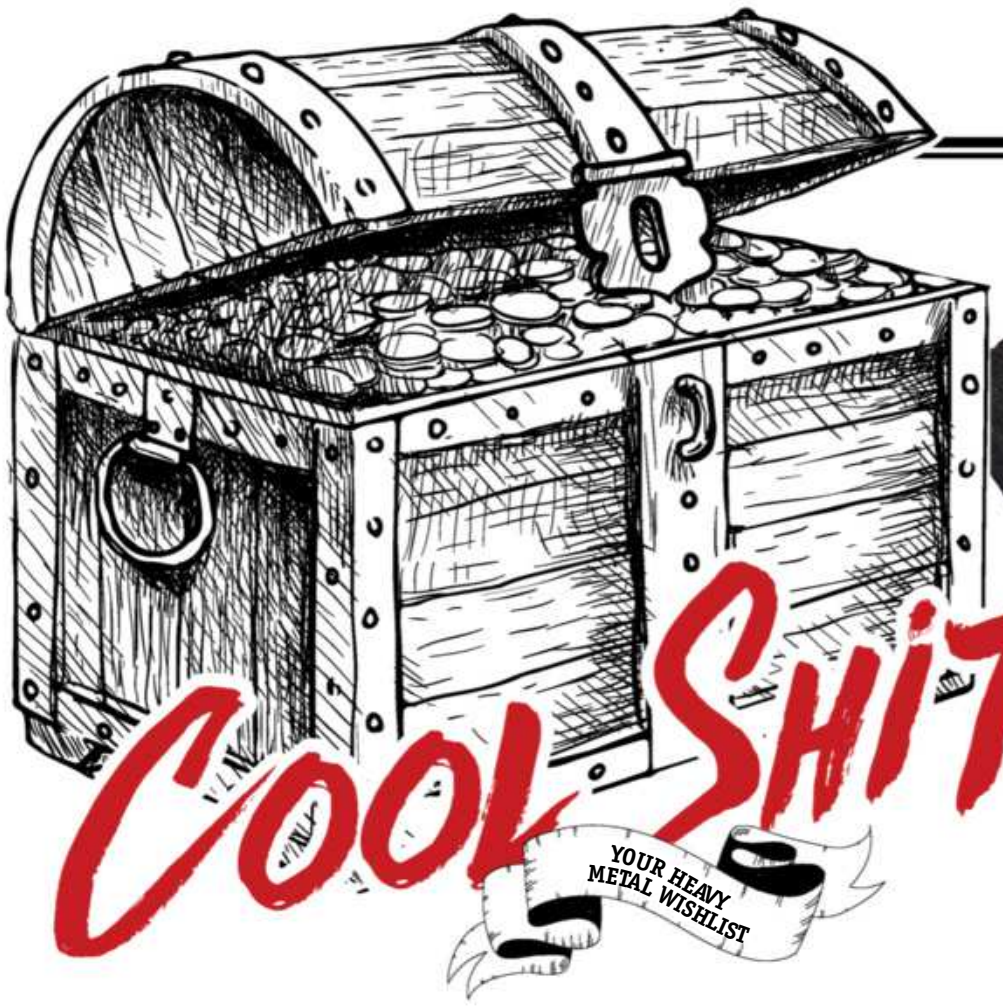

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SATAN

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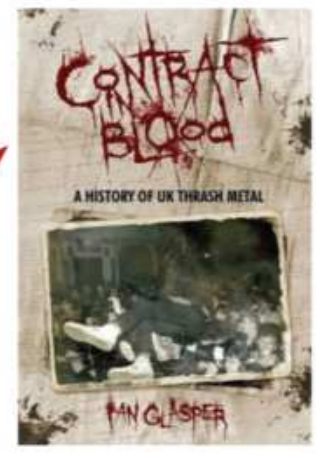

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GHOSTS IN THE MACHINE

Burned-out, bereft of ideas and rocked by personal tragedy, Within Temptation faced total implosion. As they unveil their dark and dystopian new epic, we discover how they found a way to embrace the future again

WORDS: MERLIN ALDERSLADE

METALHAMMER.COI

"I was burned out. I was tired. I was stuck and bored. I was at a complete loss, and I didn't have a clue on where to start with new music. I had to ask myself, 'How long do I want to do this? *Do* I want to do this? There was a point where I didn't think we would continue with Within Temptation."

Sharon den Adel is reflecting on the turbulent few months that almost derailed one of the biggest metal bands of the 21st century. Sat alongside her bandmate, husband and business partner Robert Westerholt, she admits that a combination of burnout, writer's block and life-altering personal issues meant that, for a time, the likelihood of a new Within Temptation album – of Within Temptation even existing in 2018 – looked very, very uncertain.

"I think the whole of Within Temptation needed a break," adds Robert, alluding as much to Within Temptation the 'brand' as the band. "It felt like we'd been on a [fast-moving] train for many years, so it was necessary. And, to be honest, we didn't really know what the outcome of that break would be."

While Sharon and Robert may have started the year in a state of flux, you wouldn't know it from speaking to them now. The pair seem in a relaxed and amiable mood as we chat over lunch in a restaurant high up in the Amsterdam Tower: a 22-storey modern build overlooking the Netherlands' capital city on what is a bright and humid late-summer afternoon. Robert dressed in a white hoody and jeans, Sharon in a suit jacket and black top, they complement each other as only couples do; often finishing each other's sentences or politely correcting one another's answers, a tag team whose dynamic doesn't eclipse their own personalities. Where some band partnerships offer an endless clash of egos, theirs is a relationship built on mutual trust, understanding and, ultimately, a shared vision for a band that has spectacularly defied the odds. One of metal's premier power couples, the Dutch duo have guided Within Temptation for over two decades; graduating from the class of symphonic metal bands that emerged from Europe in the late 90s, they've since become a modern rock powerhouse, consistently churning out critically acclaimed albums while building one of metal's largest and most dedicated audiences.

You don't become one of the biggest artists in your country's history without a bit of hard work, so we shouldn't be too surprised when Sharon mentions before the interview that they were up until 4am working on their imminent new album, *Resist*. Still, it's a far cry from the stifling "wall" the pair claimed to have both hit creatively only a few months ago.

"Yeah, I had writer's block," Sharon sighs. "I didn't feel it any more, I didn't have inspiration. I wouldn't want to go in a new direction with the band where people would go, 'What a has-been.' I'd rather not bring out a record than bring out a record I don't feel confident about."

"I was the same," agrees Robert. "I think we all had that. The main thing was that we felt we really needed a new impulse, something new to inspire us and make it worthwhile to make a record."

Stefan Helleblad shreds during WT's headline set at Bloodstock in 2015

Having kicked the arse of writer's block, Sharon is back with a vengeance

ORIGINAL PORTRAITS: ROALD & DEBBIE JANSEN@ SETVEXY PRODUCTIONS/RETOUCHING: MAGICTORCH/ALL LIVE IMAGES: GETTY

Hydra may not have been everything Within Temptation wanted, but its ensuing tour was huge

WITHIN TEMPTATION: A BLUFFER'S GUIDE

Late to the party? Don't panic, we've got you. Here's your essential guide to The Netherlands' biggest metal band

THE ALBUM(S)

Until you can get your mitts on the new record, 2007's *The Heart Of Everything* provides a nice middle-ground between the symphonic-heavy, grandiose sounds of their earlier material and what would come after. That said, its follow-up, 2011's *The Unforgiving*, is flawless, the band dialling up their rockier influences to produce an opus stacked with single-worthy earworms.

THE SONG

They've amassed an impressive array of big-hitters across their two decades in the game, but it's still hard to look past *Ice Queen* – the epic, guitars, piano, horns-and-all monster from 2000 breakthrough *Mother Earth* – as the definitive symphonic metal anthem. Eighteen years on, it still sounds like it could soundtrack the hordes of Mordor going ham on each other in the snowy 'scapes of Narnia.

THE VIDEO

While the album didn't quite turn out to be what Within Temptation were striving for, 2014's *Hydra* still packed some huge moments – not least lead single *Paradise (What About Us?)*, featuring former Nightwish singer Tarja Turunen. The song slays, and the high-concept, post-apocalyptic video accompanying it proved to be their biggest clip ever – 50million pairs of eyeballs can't be wrong.

THE LIVE SHOW

Within Temptation's live shows continue to become as famously epic as their music. We're still hoping to see one of their legendary Black Xmas shows hit the UK, but in the meantime, you could do a lot worse than check out their *Let Us Burn* DVD – featuring two huge live performances stacked with props, pyro, special effects and even a full orchestra. Now that they're going Full Sci-Fi, hell knows what they'll come up with next...

Robert Westerholt, pictured left with Ruud Jolie in 2007, is behind-the-scenes in 2018

This rather significant roadblock could hardly have come at a worse time. Within Temptation's previous album, 2014's *Hydra*, ushered in their most successful chapter yet, landing career-high positions in charts around the world including the UK (6), the US (16) and their homeland (a return to Number 1, after previous opus *The Unforgiving* just missed out). *Hydra*'s lead single, *Paradise (What About Us?)*, featuring former Nightwish singer Tarja Turunen, has racked up more than 50million views on YouTube, while the touring cycle for the album included both a headline slot at Bloodstock festival and, most significantly, a show at London's legendary Wembley Arena. The scene had been set for Within Temptation to consolidate their position as one of modern metal's most important bands. But dig a little deeper and it soon emerges that, behind the scenes, there was a growing dissatisfaction with the *Hydra* era that helped create the hole the band eventually found themselves in.

"With *Hydra*, we were searching for something new, but I think we didn't find it, you know?" offers Robert.

"I didn't feel that we made enough progress," agrees Sharon. "When we were writing the album we felt we were moving in the right direction, but there was still a little doubt. In retrospect, we felt like it just wasn't enough."

"And then you get that *doubt*," Robert chimes in. "The doubt of if you are still able to write a record, and if you can still get excited about it. It's shit when you can't do what you were born to do best."

"I DIDN'T THINK WE WOULD CONTINUE"

SHARON STRUGGLED TO SEE A FUTURE FOR WITHIN TEMPTATION

Professional frustrations are problematic enough for any artist, but there were personal issues, too, bubbling beneath the surface. Since 2011, Robert has taken a behind-the-scenes role in the band, writing a lion's share of the music but staying at home to look after the couple's children during tours – a duty he enthusiastically tells us has "been great". As frontwoman of the band, however, Sharon has no choice but to be on the road. Earlier this year, she told *Hammer* that she was starting to struggle with being away from her family for those long stretches on tour, noting: "I've missed things. Kids are growing up, parents are getting older... you have to make choices about getting a balance in your life." While she has since worked out a new touring routine for the band that she hopes will ease those problems – "we're dividing the tours: two weeks at home, two weeks away, something like that" – she reveals that, on top of all this uncertainty, she suffered a devastating family loss that only added to her conflicted feelings about the band's future.

"My dad died this year," she states quietly. "It made everything more difficult. My mum

For *Resist*, Within Temptation have gone Full Sci-Fi

is going through a [grieving] process, so I want to be at home more for her, and I felt guilty not being at home as much when my dad was sick. I felt insecure, like an open nerve."

Unable to focus on Within Temptation, Sharon instead took a personal and professional detour, pouring her emotion into a new project. The result was her first solo album, *My Indigo*: a soul-baring, introspective odyssey that painted the soulful pop of singer-songwriters like Lana Del Rey with coatings of shimmering, 80s-styled synth. Released in April, it helped channel the issues Sharon was dealing with while resetting her creative impulses.

"I needed a different expression in my songs," she says today, noting that while recent events helped accelerate its completion, ideas for *My Indigo* first started coming together "years" ago. "When I had the *My Indigo* album written and had given it a place, I felt a little stronger. With Within Temptation, it's epic music, and you need a certain kind of emotion to write those kinds of songs."

While Robert was also involved in the writing process for Sharon's solo work, the rest of the band were left on the sidelines, uncertain of their future together. How did they feel about *My Indigo*?

"I FELT GUILTY. I WAS AN OPEN NERVE"

THE DEATH OF HER FATHER LEFT SHARON STRUGGLING TO COPE WITH BAND LIFE

"They were not that expressive about it, but we explained to them why we were doing it and they understood," replies Sharon. "Ruud [Jolie, lead guitar] was the guy saying, 'Oh, I expected you to do this years ago!' They were not stressed about it, and that gave me more space. We're all friends, and we go back so long; we know each other's families, and people have respect for that. That makes us special."

A gorgeous little album in its own right, *My Indigo* nevertheless represented a potential conflict for Sharon; it had been four years since *Hydra* – a long time in music by any standard. Was this new solo venture going to further undermine the chance of Within Temptation having a future together? As it turns out, the answer is a resounding no. In fact, *My Indigo* not only pressed a much-needed reset button in Sharon's creative conscious, but ended up being the best thing that could have happened to the band.

"Because of *My Indigo*, I felt open to Within Temptation again," Sharon explains. "I found a new way of writing, and we felt we knew where to start. There was a natural progression."

Once that first trickle of promise seeped through, the dam, it appears, would soon break. From being uncertain if we would even see a new Within Temptation album again, the pair's creativity was suddenly reignited at pace, the writing process for the new record all coming together "in the last few months, really quickly." If *Hydra* represented less of an obvious evolution than its predecessor, 2011's outstanding, conceptually loaded *The Unforgiving*, *Resist* would quickly see the band embrace elements that would bode well for forward momentum. This was going to be a whole new Within Temptation – bigger, louder and heavier than ever.

"There's a bigger change than on previous records," allows Robert. "It was like, 'We need more edge!' For us, that was crucial, and I'm convinced our fans will love it. It's not that we're a different band now, but you can feel more energy there – a certain… *darkness*… in the melodies, in the vibe, which we really like. *The Reckoning* was the first new song we wrote, and I think it's probably one of the heaviest songs we've ever done. This album feels like we want to get on the barricades and kick some legs!"

He's not kidding. With *Resist*, Within Temptation have taken everything that has carried their sound this far and beefed it up to Wrestlemania-sized levels. Aforementioned album opener and lead single *The Reckoning* is

Ruud Jolie and the other WT guys gave Sharon their support when she made her solo album

Sharon turns up the heat on the main stage at Download in 2014

a case-in-point, packing what is e asily the heaviest riff the band have ever written, sounding closer to Korn's chunky heft than anything the Dutch crew have produced before and carried along an electronic hook so huge it goes off like a war horn sounded by Skrillex. Sharon is on imperious form, her powerful vocals providing a perfect foil for the excitable yelp of Papa Roach's Jacoby Shaddix, who is one of a clutch of well-executed guest appearances on the record [see Guest Who? below].

The likes of *Raise Your Banner* – in Sharon's words, "a proper metal song" – and *Mad World* – a pop-tinged industrial metal banger – continue in a similar vein, but it's not just the heavier tracks that stand out. There's a *much* bigger electronic presence across the whole album, whether it's the syncopated, stuttery chords running under *Endless War*, the waves of warm synth that wash across the bouncy, EDM-indebted *Supernova*, or the cheeky appearance of a vocoder on *Holy Ground* (yes, really). It adds to what Sharon describes as a "futuristic" sound for the album, and it's handled expertly by longtime Within Temptation producer Daniel Gibson, who manages to straddle the various elements on show without losing sight of the fact that this is still, ultimately, a metal album.

"It's about using things you like from certain music you hear, and combining it with metal!" offers Sharon. "I think that is always the way forward. We've done that for many years, and it keeps it fresh."

Sharon's solo ventures, too, have evidently wielded influence beyond her album, with the ballady *Firelight* recalling the dark folk-pop that permeated much of *My Indigo*.

"THERE'S A DARKNESS IN THIS ALBUM"

RESIST HAS TAKEN THE BAND TO STRANGE NEW SOUNDS

"That was the only song that was written for *My Indigo*," she admits with a guilty laugh. "But it was too dark. It has elements from *My Indigo*, but we roughened it up into Within Temptation."

Ultimately, it makes for an album that could and should see Within Temptation take another huge stride into metal's proverbial hall of fame. What it definitely *doesn't* sound like is a band running short on ideas or passion for what they do.

"We found an angle that we wanted to talk about," Sharon points out. Ah yes, the angle. Not only is Within Temptation's music looking to the future, but if *Resist* is anything to go by, their lyrics are, too. Taking aim at our increasingly digitalised age and what that means for our rights, our privacy and our humanity itself, the album channels a subject that has become a looming source of consternation for Sharon and Robert.

"It's a topic that always triggers us," says Sharon. You think you have a lot of freedom, but at the same time, you really don't. There are a lot of programs being developed at the moment that you think are liberating because you're getting more options for social media, but [your freedom] is being narrowed *down*. It annoys us."

"You get the feeling that you're being boxed in," adds Robert by way of explanation. "Like with music. On Spotify, if you listen to Within Temptation, you always then get suggested Nightwish and Evanescence. I mean, I want to discover other bands, but you always get the obvious choices. It's like someone is determining everything we listen to. Your own freedom of choice is there, but without you realising, they're really directing you."

"And not just with Spotify," says Sharon. "I know a friend of mine who has been working on this program. It's being developed for a radio station getting called by someone; they type in your name, they find your Facebook, they see everything about your whole life, and they can take something and discuss it with you. I think that goes too far. 'You were drunk last night? You were doing *that*?'"

Even the biggest technophobes find themselves at the mercy of technology in 2018. Social media has completely changed 21st century discourse, while the famous Apple adage from their 2009 campaign – 'There's an app for that' – has become a standardised way to learn, create and discover. While it's undoubtedly reaped plenty of benefits in recent times, the potential for governments and corporations to harness our reliance on technology for sinister means grows ever more

GUEST WHO?

The special pals Within Temptation have brought in for the new album

JACOBY SHADDIX

Papa Roach's infectiously hyperactive frontman (left) appears on *Resist*'s thumping opener and chosen lead single, *The Reckoning*. "He's so much fun!" beams Sharon. "He's just fun to be around. After he recorded his part, he was like, 'You guys are so great – you've been going 20 years, and with this song, you'll be going another 20!'" Who would bet against it with jams like this?

ANDERS FRIDÉN

The In Flames singer lends his unmistakeable tones to chest-beating heavy metal anthem *Raise Your Banner*. "Anders has an amazing voice," says Robert. "As soon as you hear it, you know it's him. We've known In Flames for a long time and you end up feeling a connection to bands like that. We've both been going a while."

JASPER STEVERLINCK

A relative unknown, Sharon met Jasper on the set of a Belgian project that united various musicians to collaborate with one another. "He's the best singer that's not been discovered yet," claims Sharon. "The best voice, period." She rated him so much, in fact, that he makes an appearance on *Resist*'s dark ballad, *Firelight*.

real – and it's not something Within Temptation take lightly.

"Insurance companies have these bots that scan the internet," offers Robert, clearly on a roll on something he has given much thought to. "That is a very simple way of seeing how much you are drinking, how much of a liability you are, everything… and suddenly you don't have health insurance anymore, or you become a risk for the authorities."

"It goes even further than that," adds Sharon. "In China, they have face recognition on zebra crossings. It's like *Black Mirror*! There is a new world being born at this moment. It's changing really fast, and that fascinates us a lot."

"It's like all those sci-fi movies," says Robert with a shake of the head. "The things that were happening there? They are more around the corner than people think."

Technology as an existential threat has been something explored by metal for decades, and for Within Temptation, it's provided an exciting – if mildly terrifying – new way for them to reconnect with what their music has always been about: telling stories through the medium of epic, overblown heavy fucking metal. And on that note: given their increasingly impressive live show, are we safe to assume that this futuristic theme will be given full rein when it comes to the stage?

"I think our show's been developing through the years," allows Robert vaguely, not wanting to lift the curtain quite yet. "It's quite a big set-up again, this tour. We think it's really, really cool. And yes, it's a very inspiring new theme! Very sci-fi…"

Given where they were only a few short months ago, it's a relief and an inspiration to see Within Temptation so excited about their next chapter. Armed with a killer new album and a wealth of ideas on how to expand on it – Robert teases something particularly high concept involving "augmented reality video", heaven help us – they have all the tools to carry their band, to carry metal itself, into a bold new future. As the conversations over our world's next big headliners continues to roll on, they're as equipped as anyone to grab the proverbial brass ring – even if neither Robert nor Sharon are ready to embrace the spotlight quite yet.

"Ha! Sharon never says yes to talent shows or premieres," laughs Robert when we ask if they're ready to become bona fide rock'n'roll celebrities. So she gets offers for that kind of thing? "They always ask her! But we are more musicians than we are… TV people'."

"I've been asked to go on *Holland's Got Talent* and all those shows," Sharon adds with a roll of the eyes. "It doesn't feel right. I have other stuff to do!"

So there's no chance of an *Osbournes*-style reality show about you and the fam?

"Never in a *million years*," Sharon shoots back with a laugh.

"That is not a good idea," chuckles Robert.

Whether they're ready for it or not, Within Temptation are about to shoot for the stars. The future is theirs.

RESIST IS OUT LATER THIS YEAR VIA SPINEFARM. WITHIN TEMPTATION PLAY A _METAL HAMMER_-SPONSORED UK TOUR IN NOVEMBER – SEE P.109 FOR DATES

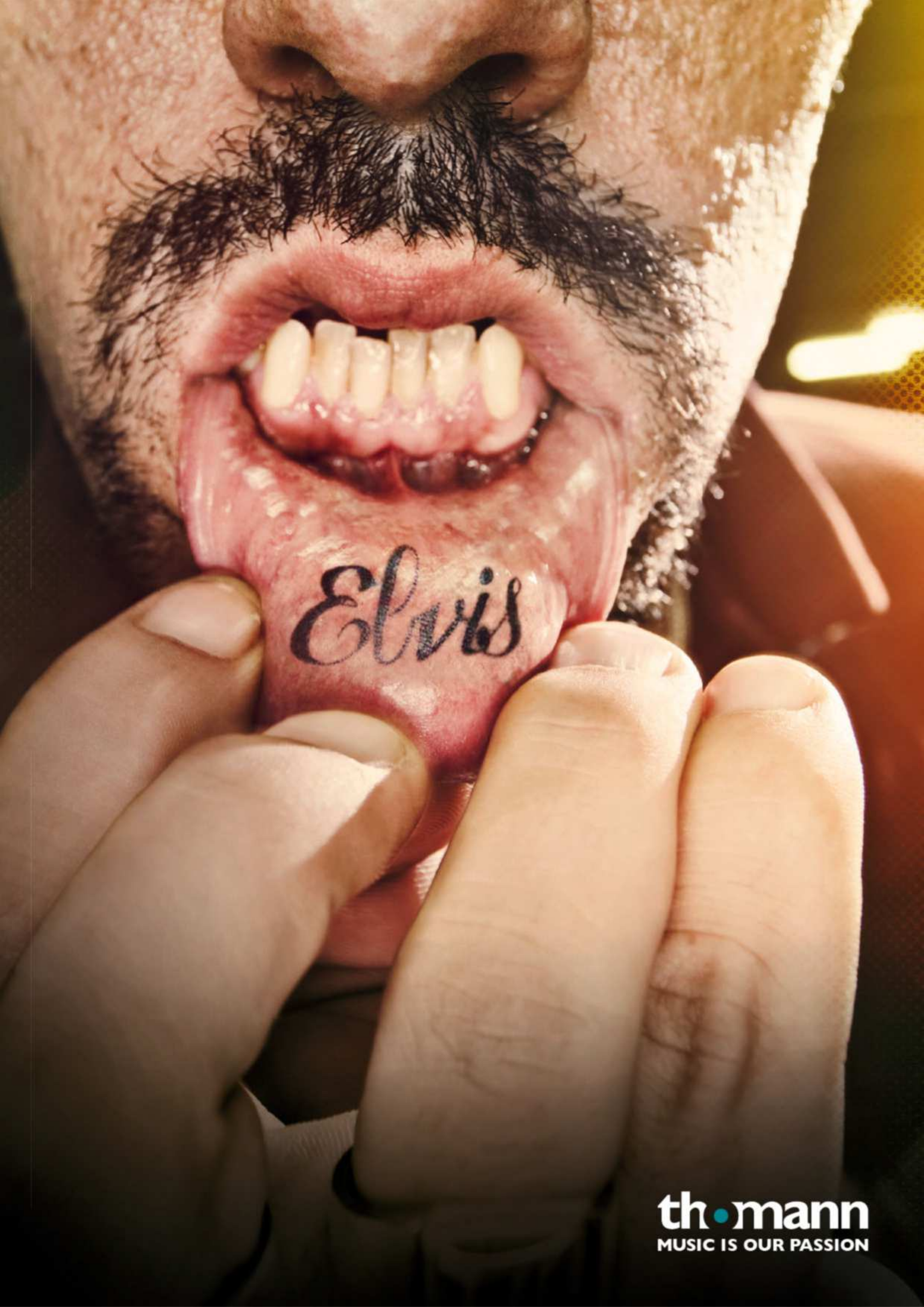
Sharon says she won't be appearing on TV talent shows any time soon

DEATH ELVIS 0:1

Probably the most useless debate in the world: Is Elvis alive?

No question. He'll still live on long after everyone who now claims he is alive has died.

It is his music that made him immortal - along with Janis, Jimi, Wolfgang Amadeus, Freddie and all the others. Many of them lost the battle against drugs, alcohol and their inner demons far too soon. But they all had vanquished death long before.


Elvis
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MUSIC IS OUR PASSION

THIS IS A MOTHERFUCKING INVITATION

As Lamb Of God support Slayer on their farewell tour, we go backstage in New York to find out what to expect when they hit our shores. Clue: it's heavy

WORDS: MÖRAT • PICTURES: JEREMY SAFFER

To anyone who's been behind the scenes of a big rock tour, it's a familiar sight: rows of tourbuses, their windows darkened to offer some illusion of privacy, more rows of trucks hauling band equipment, some dressing rooms that look the same as the last dressing rooms, and a lot of long corridors – at the end of which might be an inhospitable hospitality area. With no parties in sight, it's not exactly rock'n'roll.

Today, Lamb Of God are rolling into Times Union Center, a big steel and glass box west of the Hudson River in Albany, New York, for their support slot on Slayer's final tour, alongside Anthrax, Testament and Napalm Death. Randy Blythe is polite enough not to show it, but he hates doing interviews, not least because he inevitably has to answer the same questions over and over. Like the one about the new album, for which they have written nothing so far. Or the one about opening for a certain band of retiring thrash titans…

"People are always like, 'Is there a sadness to a farewell tour?' No, you fucking cunt! Slayer is not sad! People ask these ridiculous questions. The atmosphere is good and we're having a good time. It's the end of an era, but I don't really feel that, because it's the beginning of the tour."

Lamb Of God are 31 dates into the North American tour, but only five dates into its second leg. They recently returned to their roots with hardcore covers album *Legion: XX* under their original Burn The Priest name, and are bringing the same raw, fiery energy to a setlist that heavily draws on classic material from *Sacrament, Ashes Of The Wake* and *As The Palaces Burn*. Offstage, there's nothing interesting to do until soundcheck. Yet reality is whatever you make it, and Randy is not a man to sit around twiddling his thumbs. Four days ago, he turned to one of his favourite passions: surfing.

"What I do is I get away from the venue," he smiles. "We were in New York for two days previously and I got up early and went surfing with a buddy. I went to Rockaway Beach Surf Club, and if you look at my Instagram, there is a photo of it. It's kinda like a bar and restaurant and it's right below the subway tracks. I went around like, 'This is cool! I'm in a Ramones song!'" ➤

Randy Blythe: don't ask him if he's sad about Slayer. Please

Alex Skolnick settles down for his photography lesson

Now that's a setlist...

Everyone is equal at a LOG show

No rehearsal needed. Just a lot of pent-up rage

But while Rockaway Beach may not be far to reach, there are other days when there's nothing much within a reasonable distance of the venue. In which case, Randy will read or write or shoot photos. Today it's raining, so he plans to stay inside and teach Testament guitar god Alex Skolnick how to find his way around a camera. Anything to stay busy. "I don't sit around the venue and watch everybody play with their cell phone or whatever, because that would drive me crazy," he says.

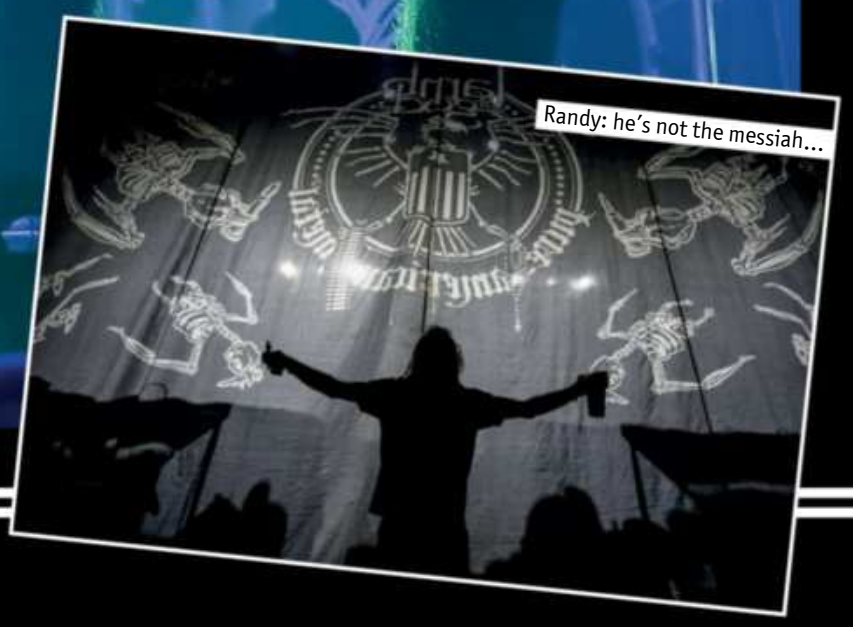
Lamb Of God – completed by guitarists Mark Morton and Willie Adler, bassist John Campbell and drummer Chris Adler (though Prong's Art Cruz is ably filling in for him on the current US leg only, due to "unforeseen circumstances") – may not have written a follow-up to 2015's *VII: Sturm Und Drang*, but they've certainly been keeping busy between shows. In 2016

"I GIVE ZERO FUCKS WHAT ANYONE THINKS OF MY MUSIC"

RANDY'S JUST HAPPY TO BE CREATING, WHATEVER THE REACTION

they released *The Duke* EP, featuring two new songs from the *Sturm…* sessions and three live tracks. In May, *Legion: XX* dropped. Like any good artist, Randy critiques his own work, always striving to improve. But he doesn't really care what you think of it. Asked if the Burn The Priest covers album was well received, he simply shrugs.

"I suppose so," he says. "The band and the management say feedback is good, but I don't read metal news sites. I give zero fucks about what anyone thinks of my music, my writing, my photography. It's great to make a living off it, but whether I was getting paid or not, I'd



Randy: he's not the messiah...

Willie tries to smash that *Candy Crush* high score

Randy doesn't have time for surgery, so straps just have to suffice

Randy, Alex and Scott Ian: we're gonna guess that one's an outtake

still be doing it. I'm too busy to read news about the metal community when I'm trying keep up with the bizarre, real-world news."

Randy means the antics of King Cheeto, the orange orangutan. These are strange times in America, strange times in the world, and one can't help but wonder if the Trump presidency has had any effect on touring.

"I don't really think it has," ponders Randy. "But I haven't been overseas to tour since Trump came in. A friend of mine was just in Russia and he says it's brutal! When you show up with an American passport, they laugh at you going through customs, and in Moscow they had t-shirts that had an illustration of Putin walking Trump on a leash, like a dog.

The band still rehearse despite their hectic touring schedule

We were touring overseas before Trump got elected and people were constantly asking, 'What are you going to do if he gets elected?' Everybody was like, 'That's not gonna happen!' and oh, how wrong we were."

Randy adds that, at this point, nothing surprises him about Trump's behaviour. All the rules have been thrown out. He tries to keep up with what's going on, cross-referencing news sources, but it's constant madness.

"You couldn't dream up what we're reading right now!" he says. "It's like, porn and Russia and backstabbing lawyers and billionaire trust-fund kids gone wrong. And Trump's style is calculated. Some people are like, 'He's just a madman!', but when something weird happens that comes close to nailing his ass, he suddenly throws up something else. It's strange, calculated and highly sociopathic behaviour."

Randy and his band will be hitting Europe in November for Slayer's European leg, playing in the UK for the first time since 2015, when Obama was in the White House. "What will I bring?" He thinks for a moment. "Loud music and zero answers as to why President Trump is in office!"

"NO, YOU FUCKING CUNT! SLAYER IS NOT SAD!"

LAMB OF GOD ARE HAVING A BLAST ON THE FAREWELL TOUR

Relentlessly on the road, LOG are a well-oiled machine. With no one buying albums these days, it's the only way to survive. "It's good for fans in a way, I guess," says Randy, "because bands have to tour more. But in the long run it's detrimental, because people don't have budgets to work on their art and they want you to crank things out as fast as possible."

Lamb Of God tour so much that Randy doesn't even need to rehearse. "The band do, but I don't," he says. "As long as I can remember the first line of the song, everything else comes back immediately."

But live performances can throw up unscripted surprises. After their date in Austin, Texas on June 20, a video surfaced showing sign language interpreter Lindsay Rothschild-Cross enthusiastically conveying the meaning of *Ruin*. Her commitment made it a viral hit, and she even appeared on US breakfast show *Good Morning America* (see panel overleaf).

"That's happened at many different gigs," smiles Randy. "And whenever I see [sign language interpreters], I'm always pleased. I can't understand what it would be like to be

John Campbell: Redneck. Oh no, sorry, it's just the lighting...

This might explain why Randy needs those straps...

Wonder if Willie Adler has read last issue's Pantera tribute feature...

deaf. I know they'll feel sonic vibrations from the PA, so it's really cool to see this sort of visual interpretation. One deaf person wrote that there are more ways to enjoy music other than just hearing it, and that's a pretty profound statement, because, for the most part, the way we enjoy music is by listening to it. It kinda brings up questions about what is the nature of music itself, if you wanna get all existential."

Other than a vocal warm-up an hour before, there are no pre-show rituals. Randy tapes up his knees and puts on braces because he has a sprained anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) and a torn meniscus (fibrous cartilage in the joint) – an injury that requires surgery when he can find time to recover for six weeks. But otherwise, it's business as usual. "I wear ankle and knee braces, because I'm old and I still jump off drum risers and shit, and then I go out and do it," he explains. "I don't have any mental preparation."

"I'M OLD AND I STILL JUMP OFF DRUM RISERS AND SHIT"

KNEE AND ANKLE INJURIES ARE NO MATCH FOR THE MIGHTY RANDY

Tonight, Lamb Of God open with the crushingly heavy *Omerta* and do not let up one bit, Randy bouncing around despite his strapped-up body. Slayer's fans welcome them with open arms: no trolling 'Slayer! Slayer! Slayer!' chants in earshot. The sound of the entire Times Union Center screaming, *'Now you've got something to die for!'* is quite something, and a pit-slamming *Redneck* closes the set.

Yes, Randy politely answers our questions today, but you can tell there's one that's getting particularly annoying. For the record, being on Slayer's farewell tour does not make Lamb Of God think about their own longevity. At all.

"A lot of people are like, 'Slayer's going away, who's gonna take their place?' says Randy. "But it's not liked this weird line to take some sort of position in the heavy metal world and, for me, Lamb Of God's longevity is dependent on the condition of Lamb Of God. Right now, we're in good condition, so I don't bother thinking about it. We'll do it until we can't do it anymore or we don't want to." ✠

Randy has no need to rehearse, but there's always time for an (alcohol-free) beer

LAMB OF GOD OPEN FOR SLAYER IN THE UK IN NOVEMBER. SEE P.109 FOR DETAILS.
***LEGION: XX* IS OUT NOW VIA NUCLEAR BLAST**

"I DISCOVERED RANDY WAS A BADASS!"

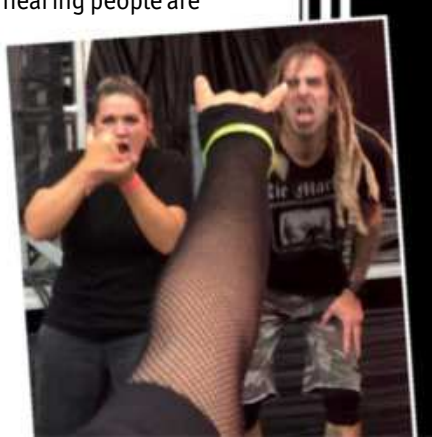
Lindsay Rothschild-Cross went viral when footage of her interpreting Lamb Of God's Austin, Texas set for deaf and hard-of-hearing fans blew up the internet. She's a high school sign language teacher and interpreter, and has been interpreting at gigs for three years. She is based in Texas, and the Austin show (a part of the Slayer tour), was her first time working a metal show

HOW DO YOU PREPARE FOR A SHOW?
"Weeks before, our team goes back and forth with the event co-ordinator, to set up where our interpreting stage should be. A lot of times, they want to put deaf people way in the back. At Lamb Of God, I was right there next to them. That way a deaf person can look at me, and just barely look and see the artist too. And then they're right in front of the stage system; they can feel that."

WHAT WAS THE LAMB OF GOD SHOW LIKE?
"It was their *favourite*. Randy is the only artist ever out of my whole team of interpreters that has ever gestured. I did *Walk With Me In Hell*, and he gestured walking, and then he pointed to himself, and then he pointed down at the ground, and the deaf people loved it. It makes them feel equal, you know?"

HOW DID YOU END UP DOING IT?
"One of the team members had to drop out last minute, and I was asked to take over. I had to do a lot of research on Randy's life, his struggle, and his pain. I was like, 'This guy is badass!' I think the reason I did so well was because I incorporated all of his feelings into my sign. He screams, right? He shows his anger and his passion. I can't scream, so I show it with my facial grammar, which shows adjectives, adverbs – all of that."

WHAT CAN PEOPLE DO IF THEY WANT TO HELP MAKE GIGS MORE ACCESSIBLE?
"If someone wants to be an interpreter, they have to go to college for it, get a degree, and then be certified. A lot of hearing people are like, 'Why would deaf people even go to a concert?' That ignorance is really gut-wrenching to me. They can enjoy the vibe, just like everybody else. It's different when you listen to your favourite band in the car and at a show. So be respectful and kind."



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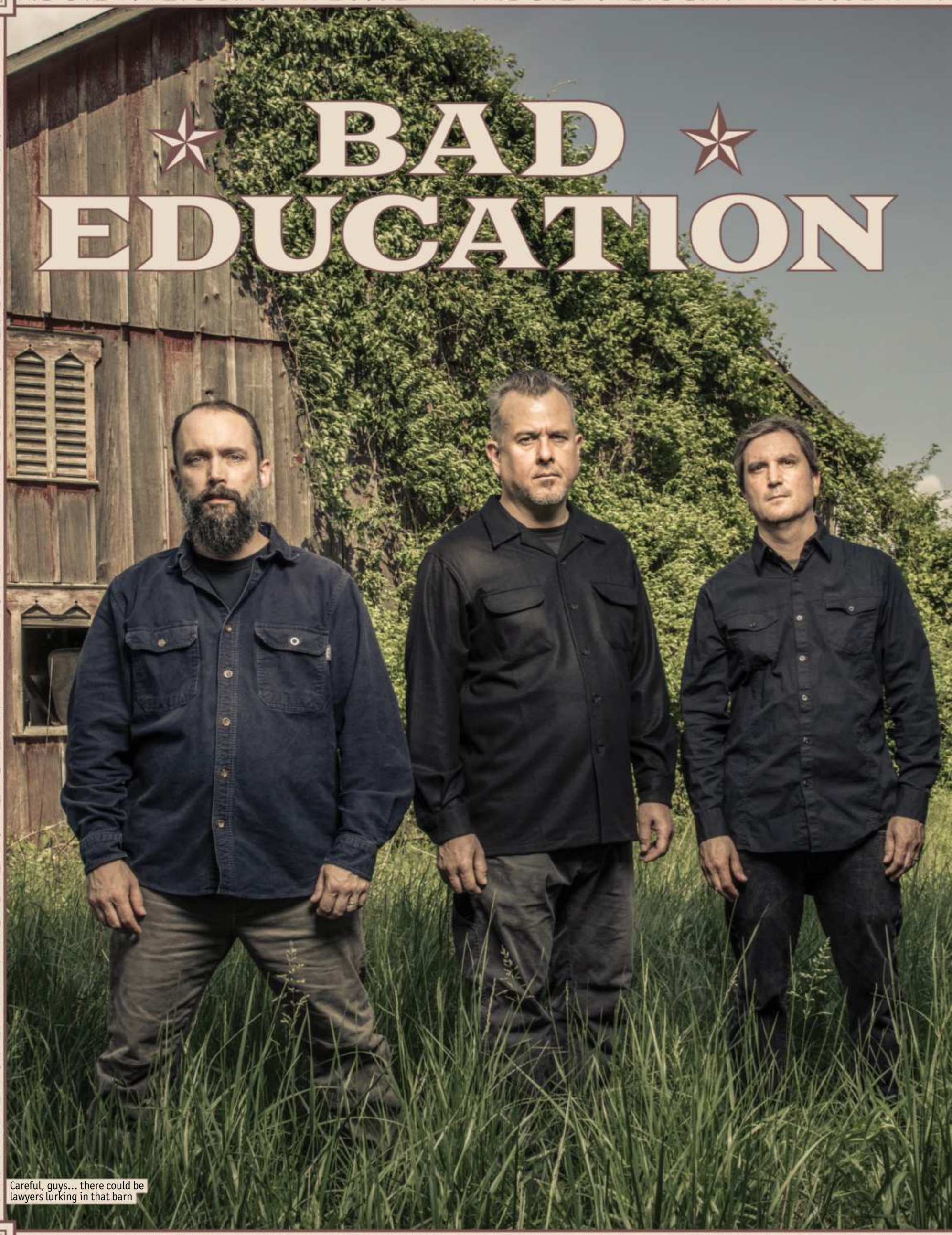


Careful, guys... there could be lawyers lurking in that barn

Maryland rockers Clutch have returned with *Book Of Bad Decisions*, another album full of weird shit and tall tales. We asked them to school us on the songs

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

From writing about redneck samurai to Willie Nelson's personal stash, it's fair to say Clutch are among the most colourful lyricists on the planet, crafting immersive narratives that reference some of the most illustrious figures from literature, folklore and history. *Hammer* caught up with vocalist Neil Fallon and drummer Jean-Paul Gaster to get the inside stories behind the songs on their 12th album, *Book Of Bad Decisions*. Taking inspiration from everything from crab cake recipes to Wikipedia entries, it's their most ambitious chapter to date.

GIMME THE KEYS

Sample lyric: *'Gimme the keys and get the hell out of Dodge'*

JEAN-PAUL GASTER: "The song deals with our first US tour, and a particular incident that happened when we played a hardcore show/skinhead rally – not Nazi skinheads, just regular ones – in Lawrence, Kansas. Basically, we got threatened with a firearm when the sound guy thought we'd stolen a microphone."

NEIL FALLON: "The [2015 horror] movie *Green Room* is probably the most accurate portrayal of hardcore shows I've seen! Ha ha ha! That whole show was cinematic – there were huge storm clouds and heat-lightning striking in the distance, and tornado sirens going off all around. You couldn't have scripted it better."

SPIRIT OF '76

Sample lyric: *'Moon collapsed in the garden / Vikings looted the plains'*

NEIL: "In 1976 I was in Boston for the Bicentennial of the US [the 200th anniversary of the Declaration Of Independence], which basically turned into this huge patriotic orgasm. The melody to this song had that anthemic feel which made me very emotional, but I didn't want to write a song like [George M. Cohan's march] *You're A Grand Old Flag*. I started thinking – instead of 1776, I wanted to capture 1976 and all the things that happened that year. For example, the line *'Moon collapsed in the garden'* was about [The Who drummer] Keith Moon collapsing at Madison Square Garden, while *'The Mohican'* is a reference to [Robert de Niro's character in] *Taxi Driver*."

BOOK OF BAD DECISIONS

Sample lyric: *'I walked into the station, all covered in blood'*

JEAN-PAUL: "Lyrically, this was inspired by Cormac McCarthy, who we're both huge fans of. It's this idea of describing scenarios in beautiful but grotesque detail, almost as if you're in the room."

NEIL: "Touring pre-cell phones, we'd be waiting in line to use the only working payphone in town, and at 3am you'd run into some very interesting characters, giving you looks like: 'If you don't hang up soon, you won't see sunrise.' This was a tribute to that, in a typically McCarthy way; there's a person covered in blood, trying to get from point A to point B during the dark night of the soul."

"WE TRIED TO DRIVE THE SNAKES OUT WITH LOUD MUSIC... IT DIDN'T WORK"

ONCE UPON A TIME, CLUTCH LIVED IN A HOUSE INFESTED WITH REPTILES

HOW TO SHAKE HANDS

Sample lyrics: *'Take that boy out his crib / and put him in the executive office!'*

JEAN-PAUL: "We try not to be influenced by politics these days – there's so much shouting and negativity, a lot of effort to take away from other people rather than working together for the common good. In some ways it's impossible to not be influenced by what's going on, but Neil was more interested in poking fun at that. It's the story of a guy who runs for President because he's got a lot of ideas... which seems to be popular right now!"

IN WALKS BARBARELLA

Sample lyric: *'Space trucking son ain't what it used to be'*

NEIL: "[2015's] *X-Ray Visions* and [2016's] *Firebirds* were parts one and two of a concept. *Barbarella* is part three – the narrator of those previous songs is now speaking to his son 20 years after those instances, saying, 'If you go driving in the desert you need to be careful', but at the same time looking back at those events with fondness."

JEAN-PAUL: "It started out as a funk tune – I'm a huge James Brown fan and one

thing he was best at doing was organising the individual parts so that each was different, so even if it's simple, the power of it all coming together makes it more powerful."

VISION QUEST

Sample lyric: *'Oh pale rider you're in need of a hella talking to'*

NEIL: "I've always been a fan of the boast, whether in rock'n'roll or hip hop, and this is a boast about out-drinking the Grim Reaper!"

JEAN-PAUL: "It's got a New Orleans feel, which puts a twist on the song. We also had our buddy Chris Brooks [from fellow Maryland rockers Lionize] play piano, to give it a boogie-woogie vibe via Motörhead. It was inspiring to be around Motörhead. I honestly can't say enough good things about them as people. I miss that band, and I miss Lemmy."

WEIRD TIMES

Sample lyric: *'Your thetan levels are far too extreme!'*

JEAN-PAUL: "This speaks to the craziness of the times, painting a picture of how we're living in a hyper-driven news-cycle scenario."

NEIL: "One day I went into town and there were several religious organisations on each corner farming for new followers and I just thought… that's so *weird*, man. It's almost like a farmer's market for the soul. I make references to Scientology ['thetan' means 'spirit'], because I'm fascinated by the intersection between religion and science fiction; I'm not a fan of L. Ron Hubbard's writing, but what he was able to achieve… I just don't get it."

EMILY DICKINSON

Sample lyric: *'Hooked on phantom power, the acres seemed to ache'*

JEAN-PAUL: "This was inspired by a farmhouse we once lived in, in Bakerton, West Virginia. It was built in 1760 and had a snake infestation. We tried to drive them out by playing as loud and long as we could… which didn't work."

NEIL: "My belief in ghosts wavers depending on mood, but it was strongest the year and a half I lived in that house. I had a recurring idea of one day pulling up the driveway and seeing a woman's profile in the attic. Emily Dickinson is the most prominent American Victorian woman I can think of, and the idea of being her suitor was a surreal way to describe what that time was like."

SONIC COUNSELOR

Sample lyric: *'Look no further you have found the right church'*

JEAN-PAUL: "We started playing *Sonic Counselor* on tour last summer, playing some beautiful outdoor venues with Primus. The whole vibe was really nice and that's how Neil came up with the original concept."

NEIL: "I heard the beat to this song and immediately saw it as a tribute to Clutch fans. Whether it's Birmingham, Alabama or Birmingham, UK, there's a camaraderie that is almost church-like. People sometimes say, 'You're like a preacher onstage', but I think it has more to do with the congregation than the people onstage and treating the show as a special, sanctified event every night."

Clutch (left to right): Tim Sult, Neil Fallon, Jean-Paul Gaster, Dan Maines

A GOOD FIRE

Sample lyric: *'I remember hearing Sabbath for the first time'*

JEAN-PAUL: "This song was inspired by the Maryland doom scene in the late 80s and early 90s. There were a lot of bands that were directly inspired by Black Sabbath, and would play these field parties, all stood around a giant bonfire – it was a really fun time."

NEIL: "I'm sure a lot of *Hammer* readers have clear memories of hearing Sabbath, and for me it was a field party in October, drizzling around a bonfire where somebody had a boombox playing *Black Sabbath*. I was very young and it terrified me but I *liked* it and wanted to get scared again."

GHOUL WRANGLER

Sample lyric: *'Mabel won't you wake up we got lawyers in the barn'*

NEIL: "I've always had this story about some rural farmers finding unexpected characters in their barn. It didn't have to be lawyers, it could have been doctors, or politicians – anyone that wore a suit – eating their livestock. Maybe there's an analogy about the white-collar world feeding off the working class, but it's more I wanted to write a mini horror movie, so it was about an old man on his last legs overcoming a baker's dozen lawyers who eat his livestock."

JEAN-PAUL: "Lyrically it's totally over the top, but it's the way that Neil screams *'ghoul wrangler!'* that really sets the tone."

H.B. IS IN CONTROL

Sample lyric: *'The joint erupted in a medieval melee'*

NEIL: "This was about looking back at our time on the road, where sometimes the

"IT'S ABOUT RURAL FARMERS FINDING LAWYERS WHO ARE EATING THEIR LIVESTOCK"

NEIL WANTED TO WRITE A MINI HORROR MOVIE. HE SUCCEEDED.

only place to eat was a 24-hour diner. You would pull in at three or four in the morning, and find a very colourful mix of people inside. The things you'd hear and see were almost always inexplicable, and I had this notion of looking at that classic American diner, but painted by Hieronymus Bosch. There's an oblique reference in there to Celtic Frost, too, because his art has been used on so many metal covers that I wanted to pay homage to that."

HOT BOTTOM FEEDER

Sample lyric: *'Grab a biscuit cutter and pack it 'til it's filled'*

JEAN-PAUL: "It turned out great – it lends itself to live sets, and is super-fun to play. I remember Neil coming into the studio like, 'The song is going to be a recipe for crab cakes' and we were like, 'Awesome!'"

NEIL: "It turns out that Vance [Powell, Grammy-winning record producer] also did a track with Seasick Steve, which was his recipe for biscuits, and includes the lyric *'biscuit cutter'* [*Southern Biscuits*]. What are the chances? It's also typical that the most controversial lyric I've written in 27 years is one I *didn't* write – the people of Maryland were upset because I didn't include Old Bay Seasoning in the recipe."

PAPER & STRIFE

Sample lyric: *'Reptilian oil pompadour set to kill'*

JEAN-PAUL: *Paper & Strife* is a straight-ahead rocker, designed to make you move!"

NEIL: "I came up with the lyrics for this after watching the [1969] documentary *Salesman*, a film which is seen as the granddaddy of documentaries. It follows door-to-door bible salesmen in the late 60s. I've always liked the characters of grifters, the guy with the big pompadour who lives in his car and is swindling people. It's not a nice thing, but there's an element of romance and cool to it – as much as I hate to admit it – and the way these people live on the edge of society."

LORELEI

Sample lyric: *'Oh my compass is spinning and I'm so far from home'*

NEIL: "I wanted to write about A Shogun Named Marcus [the character in Clutch's 1993 song] in his winter days, but I realised there was a sense of humour before that wasn't really present. So it became about the character in [1997's] *The Elephant Riders*, who after the war has sold his elephant and become a hermit in a cave, where people see him as a sage of sorts. It's about being lost and not knowing what to do with one's self – but I don't think it's a sad thing. It can be good – if you know exactly where you're going, life can be boring." ✠

***BOOK OF BAD DECISIONS* IS OUT NOW VIA WEATHERMAKER.**
CLUTCH TOUR THE UK IN DECEMBER – SEE P.109 FOR DATES

Living God I Shall Not Forgive Jesus Christ I Forgive Thee Not

As Behemoth unveil the follow-up to *The Satanist*, Nergal tells us why he's refusing to compromise on his beliefs - and that when it comes to fighting the Church, he's only just getting started...

WORDS: TOM O'BOYLE • IMAGES: GRZEGORZ GOLEBIOWSKI

Behemoth frontman Adam 'Nergal' Darski and his arch enemy Jesus Christ have resurrection in common. Diagnosed with leukaemia in 2010, Nergal recovered with a renewed lust for life and the determination to oppose his enemies in the Catholic Church, an institution that he believes poisons hearts and minds across the world. "I'm here for a reason," he says passionately. "I'm a fucking cosmic child sent to make some fucking impact, to impress some people, to inspire."

Such supreme confidence, not to be mistaken for arrogance, can only come from the lips of someone who has had a close brush with death. "The crucial reflection I had was that my life may end any time, so from then on I've made sure that I live the way I want to, never compromising for money, friends or attention," he reveals. "I'm only going to do stuff I'd die for; that I'm passionate about. That's how *The Satanist* was born."

Behemoth, Poland's premier blackened death metal band – completed by bassist Orion and drummer Inferno – have spent 27 years refining their unique brand of brutalising blasphemy. 2014's *The Satanist* was their magnum opus; the album that almost never was, that became the most significant extreme metal album of the decade, signifying not only that Nergal was back, but that his band were ready for the next level. The response was rapturous from all quarters, the live shows in support of the record devastating; it was an easy choice for *Metal Hammer*'s album of the year.

"*The Satanist* was a second coming for us – we made no compromises," affirms Nergal. "I knew it might be the last record. When I said that, I wasn't just trying to piss people off, I believed it."

So much so, that writing a follow-up proved extremely difficult. "I was blank, empty. No music left in me," he remembers. "We started this neverending touring cycle, got round the globe twice, made sure we got our music everywhere we could, and in the meantime I began to think of forming a totally different project."

Nergal paired up with respected English musician John Porter to form Me And That Man, releasing 2017's *Songs Of Love And Death*, a pitch-black blues rock record. The two have since gone their separate ways, Nergal forging forwards without him, but the experience had the desired effect. "Within me there was a new breed [of music] that I had to release one way or another," he reflects. "I'm still very pleased with it. It needed to happen in order to reset my system, to come back to my black metal cave with twice as much strength. I came back as hungry as a wolf."

Behemoth's forthcoming 11th album, *I Loved You At Your Darkest*, is their most brazenly blasphemous offering yet. The record leaves much of *The Satanist*'s elaborate song structures behind for something instantly more accessible, broadening their musical horizons while retaining their effortless capacity for infectiously extreme punishment; an anti-Christian super-weapon aimed directly at the cross. "When we started working on it, the band couldn't stop me," enthuses Nergal. "They were like, 'Stop bringing new ideas, we have plenty!' I was like, 'No! New song! Next week, new song!' I couldn't stop!"

As the band's creative visionary, Nergal brings the riffs and "the crazy ideas". "It's always been like that," he affirms. "Pretty much every one of our album titles are powerful, one-word statements: *Satanist, Demigod, Evangelion, Apostasy*. Very straight to the point. I felt we had to reinvent ourselves. We cannot top *The Satanist*, it's the ultimate album title, so instead we have chosen to do something that might be confusing!"

He laughs, acknowledging fans might bristle at *I Loved You At Your Darkest*, a title taken from the words of Christ himself. "How about getting to the root of all evil – the *Bible* itself – and stealing a quote, twisting it around, and using the tool of the opponent against them? How more blasphemous can you get?" he asks. "When I came across that quote, it reflected exactly how I feel about my heroes – Lucifer, Prometheus, Dionysus, Icarus. All the fallen heroes and outcasts I worship in my art; all who have fallen, just like man is born to fall."

Nergal gleefully spits in the face of Christianity and all monotheistic religions – those who believe there is only one god – for as he sees it, they are the tool of oppressors shaming mankind into fear of his natural will. Nergal preaches individuality, freedom of thought and spirit. "My philosophy is very humane," he says, "and this is what art is for – to provoke people, to encourage you to think for yourself."

"I was empty. I had no music left in me"

NERGAL STRUGGLED TO FIND INSPIRATION TO WRITE A FOLLOW-UP TO *THE SATANIST*

God = Dog, the lead single from the record, proved instantly provocative for its overtly blasphemous but, in some eyes, crassly simplistic title. "There's a lot of people saying '*God = Dog*, what the fuck kind of primitive shit is that?!'" laughs Nergal. "With Behemoth, we easily go from very straight-up, primitive messages to sophisticated ones. I like to play with both extremities. I was driving with my friend Mario in downtown LA and I saw a billboard for [synth goth duo] Prayers. I was intrigued; I'd never heard of them. I listened to their song *From Dog To God*, and it was amazing. I thought the title was super-cool; it inspired me to play with that concept. I remembered Slipknot's 'People = Shit' slogan. The obvious reversing of the word 'god' into 'dog' is straight-up provocation, but there's a deeper meaning – we stole a quote from Aleister Crowley's *The Book Of The Law*: 'Is a God to live in a dog? No! But the highest are of us.' That's what the kids' choir in the song sing. I thought it was so powerful. Writing a song is a puzzle; if it fits, it fits. The last thing you worry about is what will people think. That's not what true artists do."

It's a concept the band are about to take to literal extremes, as Nergal gleefully explains. "We are releasing a very limited amount of God = Dog food – I'm not joking! It's gonna be vegan,

Is Nergal channelling his inner Papa for this look? Either way, we're sure the church will love it

Behemoth's live shows are intense AF

GINA WETZLER/GETTY

"We're making vegan dog food in the shape of a cross"

THOUGHT BEHEMOTH WERE A SERIOUS BAND? THEY'VE GOT A WICKED SENSE OF HUMOUR

and packaged in the shape of a cross, so you can feed the cross to your dog," he cackles.

Nergal is used to controversy, especially in Poland, where he is a bona fide celebrity, frequently clashing with the church and the law. He was famously embroiled in a blasphemy trial, following an incident in 2007 where he tore up a *Bible* onstage, but was acquitted. Last year, Polish authorities accused him of mocking the country's coat of arms on a t-shirt design, but the charges were dismissed.

"I'm an easy target," he shrugs. "I'm in the news; if those idiots made a little effort and dug into what extreme metal has to offer, the level of blasphemy would kill them, but they'll never do it – it's fucking easier to shoot at Darski. I have no respect for the people that do it. It's a tax on who I am, on my freedom. I need to pay it and go back and forth to the courts to confront mindless idiots for the fact I do what I do."

It's not a fight Nergal, a proud iconoclast, is going to back down from. It's a battle he wholeheartedly believes needs to be fought. "Poland is going backwards," he says. "The country has been democratic for only 30 years, but we are losing it already, with a new, church-inspired political approach, conservatives trying to drag us backwards with censorship, anti-abortion laws. The Church is still corrupting our lives; it is the root of all evil. All monotheistic religions are, including Islam, Judaism and Catholicism."

Of course, his celebrity status has its positives as well as its negatives. "I like it," he says. "I don't have a problem with that kind of attention. But I want to point out that I'm a musician; calling me a celebrity is a misconception."

Since his recovery, Nergal has emerged as one of metal's figureheads, attributable doubtlessly to the brilliance of their live shows and albums, but in part to his social media presence. Much more candid than the standard, grim posture of most extreme metal musicians, Nergal is unafraid of letting fans see his human side, once the blood and corpsepaint have been washed off.

"A lot of musicians are afraid of getting out of their safety zone," he explains. "You know, 'I'm not gonna show my face 'cos I don't wanna ruin my reputation; I don't wanna look too nice, I'm not gonna show how much I love my dogs.' But I'm an extrovert – my face hasn't been a mystery for decades, why should I hide behind a mask? I have an onstage and offstage persona. I'm making my life art, and I'm fucking proud of it. My Instagram is bursting with my love for life."

All of this may indicate that Behemoth is increasingly becoming the Nergal show, and that the other members of the band are secondary to his ego. "No, no, no," he quickly insists. "I really appreciate the fact that even though we're all different, we are united. I am indeed a driving force of the band, but I know there are partners there, always ready to take it to the next level."

I Loved You… will doubtless see the band continue in the same vein as they have since their return, touring relentlessly on bigger and bigger stages. As ever with a previously underground band reaching new heights, there will be cries of 'sell-out', but they fall on deaf ears.

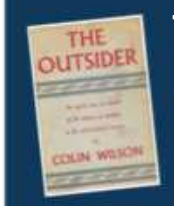
"We're not making compromises," explains Nergal. "I'm not here to say to new fans, 'Fuck you, don't follow us.' I'm here to say, 'Come.' I've no problem bringing extreme metal to the next level. I'm a Venom and Bathory devotee. Look at what they did in the 80s; they didn't wanna stay in their fucking cave, they wanted to reach out! That's exactly our point of view. There's no limit as long as we don't compromise our art."

Looking to the immediate future, Nergal has big plans for the album launch. Come October 5, fans will be able to visit The Underdog gallery on London's Crucifix Lane (where else?) to view *I Loved You…* artwork, as well as a 'making of' documentary and a playback of the album. "It'll be unique," he enthuses. "We're striking back harder than ever. Behemoth are more than just a metal band – I really want people to see that. There's a whole fucking universe behind the songs we're making, and we're about to prove it." ✠

I LOVED YOU AT YOUR DARKEST IS OUT OCTOBER 5 VIA NUCLEAR BLAST. THE LAUNCH EVENT AT THE UNDERDOG IS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC 2-4PM, FOLLOWED BY A SIGNING AT HMV OXFORD STREET. SEE: WWW.HMV.COM/HMVLIVE/BEHEMOTH

Pages of Sin

Nergal runs through the books that made him the dissenter he is today



THE OUTSIDER
COLIN WILSON (1956)

"It's a study on the state and mind of outsiders. I go back to it when writing lyrics; it's one of my main sources of inspiration. When I get in a rebellious mood, it sums up how I see myself; it can be very educating for people to read."

THE MASTER AND MARGARITA
MIKHAIL BULGAKOV (1967)

"It's my *Bible*, a classic Russian novel up there with Dostoyevsky. The main characters are the Devil himself and a gang in his infernal service. They show up in Moscow and shit hits the fan. It's one of the very few stories that ends with Satan's victory. Read it!"

PLEASE KILL ME: THE UNCENSORED ORAL HISTORY OF PUNK
LEGS McNEIL AND GILLIAN McCAIN (1997)

"It's the story of the original punk movement. The narration is by all these amazing icons – Sex Pistols, Ramones, The Clash, Lou Reed. The story's so out of control, like, 'Shit, did this really happen?!' It's frightening. Today's politically correct safety zone isn't healthy. Push past it and keep evolving."

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Highest Hopes

Having already conquered Wembley, it was time for Nightwish to bring their spectacular show to an even bigger stage: headlining the final night of Bloodstock 2018. We went to watch it all come together

WORDS: HANNAH MAY KILROY • PICTURES: MICK HUTSON

It's Sunday morning at Bloodstock festival, the queues for coffee are long and there are already plenty of punters mooching through the mud. Backstage, you can spot the likes of Fozzy and Kirk Windstein in the catering tent, sheltering from the drizzle and fuelling up for their sets later today. Beyond that are the band's trailers, where we find tonight's headliners waiting in the wings: Nightwish. In a few hours, they'll be shaking the hordes out of their final-day fatigue with massive anthems and bursts of pyro.

As the rock and metal world engage in debates about which modern bands can genuinely pull off headlining festivals, you cannot deny that the symphonic metal Finns have earned that status. After three singers – and a lot of media attention over two departures – eight albums, beautifully elaborate stage shows and international success, the magical vision of Nightwish that was dreamt up by Tuomas Holopainen more than 20 years ago is going stronger than ever. Nightwish are celebrating their career on this current tour based on new compilation album *Decades*, released in March. For Tuomas, revisiting their past has been an enlightening journey.

"It's a lot of fun playing these old songs, but it's also good to realise that while I remember the person behind those songs, I would never write them again now," says Tuomas. "Like *ElvenPath* – it's about warming up the sauna and flying to the moon with a witch on a broomstick… I mean… what?! Ha ha ha! I wouldn't write those kind of lyrics anymore, but I remember back in 1996 when I did those songs, I was dead serious: it was all about fantasy and fairytales. I'm not ashamed or embarrassed by them, but it is interesting to see the evolution."

Both Tuomas and singer Floor Jansen appear relaxed and open when *Hammer* meets them separately backstage at Bloodstock today, hanging out in their trailers before warm-ups. For Tuomas, deciding what ➤

"IT'S A CLICHÉ, BUT WE'RE DOING BETTER THAN EVER"

TUOMAS HAS COME THROUGH SOME DARK TIMES WITH NIGHTWISH

Nightwish (left to right): Emppu Vuorinen, Kai Hahto, Troy Donockley, Tuomas Holopainen, Floor Jansen, Marco Hietala

"No hard feelings about that interview Kerry, yeah?"

Nightwish's loyal fans, hanging on every note

songs to include on the Decades tour was a lengthy undertaking; Nightwish's founder and chief member listened to all of their albums, made notes and decided what would work best for a retrospective.

"There are some songs, like *The Carpenter*, which is there because it was the first single," he explains. "It's not a very good song, but it's iconic. I don't think some of these songs will ever be played again, so this is the one chance to hear them."

But of course, in looking back he also had to face some of his past lows. A particularly dark time for him was the period before 2007's *Dark Passion Play* album, when first singer Tarja Turunen was dismissed, and the band struggled with unwanted media attention and the difficulty of finding a replacement. "All that hassle was going on for years," Tuomas remembers. "I never thought it would be such a big deal; it blew out of proportion and then the Prime Minister of Finland was talking about it on the news!"

Those memories had an impact on his song choices, as he filtered out those he couldn't bring himself to dwell on. "I don't want to play any songs that I don't feel comfortable playing," Tuomas says firmly. "The song *Bye Bye Beautiful* deals with the departure of Tarja, and it's very personal. We decided not to play it again. Those personal lyrics have an effect on you when you play it live. There's *The Poet And The Pendulum*, in which I kill myself within the song. The lyrics reflect that hard time so strongly that it's very difficult to play, even though it's a great song. I remember how life was back then, and I don't want to go back."

For Floor, who's been in the band since 2013, it's fun to put her own spin on the old material live; the most important thing was to make it her own. "It was a real honour to sing those old songs," she smiles. "They were a part of my upbringing, too – but I needed to sing them often enough, and to forget how, say, Tarja sang them, because I'm not her. We had to adapt them to our modern sound, now with Troy [Donockley] in the band as well, with his vocals and instruments like the uilleann pipes and the flutes, and much more electric guitar... it's been a great challenge to shape the songs into the Nightwish we are today."

Kai practises his levitation skills backstage

Even after 17 years in Nightwish, Marco Hietala still loves his job

The man behind the band as well as the keys, Tuomas Holopainen

Back in 2017, Nightwish decided to take an 18-month sabbatical. Speaking to both Tuomas and Floor today, it's clear the break did them a world of good, rejuvenating them for the next chapter. They were able to work on solo projects – Floor with Northward (see panel on p.60) and Tuomas with progressive folk project Auri – as well as spend time with family.

"The biggest thing I achieved during that time off was the Auri record," says Tuomas, speaking proudly about the band

"And how do you spell that...?"

Floor gets lippy

he started with his wife Johanna Kurkela and his Nightwish colleague Troy, whose debut self-titled album was released in March.

"That was the project we had in mind for the past six or so years. But then there was also a lot of being at home, a lot of travelling, I went sailing on the Mediterranean… just a lot of stuff that I always wanted to do but didn't have the time.

"Even before we started The Endless Forms Most Beautiful tour [in 2015], I floated this idea around about how about we take a year off," Tuomas remembers. "I think we all needed it. We all achieved what we were after and everybody got a little distance from Nightwish… and when we came back, it felt really good again."

For Floor, the break was spent a little differently – she became a mother. "It felt like everything is new in the world," she smiles. "In The Netherlands, new mums have to go back to work within three months; I emigrated [to Sweden] so I didn't have to do that, but it's horrible. I think within three months every mum can tell you that you're so high on hormones that your brain isn't working yet! Regardless of how important your job is, I don't think it's a good idea. So I'm very grateful."

Floor even had the opportunity to take her baby daughter on Nightwish's US leg of the Decades tour, earlier this year. "There was no way I would leave her alone in the first year of her life!" she says. "So I had the great luxury of being able to bring her along. I think it's been a highlight of the tour for me, being able to successfully combine motherhood with the shows. Having a one-year-old on board was something you can't plan too much – ha ha ha! – but it really worked. I had a blast and it was the ultimate proof of seeing these worlds come together."

Life on the road as Nightwish, whether or not babies are on board, seems to be running smoothly. Tuomas uses his spare time to read, alternating between fiction and non-fiction – "Right now I'm reading a Stuart Diamond [US Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist] book about human societies and how they evolve, and also a fantasy book," – while Floor loves to work out and listen to film music while reading. But there is one activity they all partake in together.

"What we did last night is very telling," Tuomas muses. "All of us went to eat at an Indian restaurant. That's a little hobby we have: the Nightwish curry club! We all go together and then do ratings. Believe it or not, we are good friends, and we all spend time together outside of the band. But then afterwards, everybody went back to their hotel rooms, just to have some alone time for a few hours. So it's all about balancing."

While Nightwish have been looking to the past with *Decades*, Tuomas is focusing firmly on the future. He has already written a huge amount of new material for the next Nightwish album, but none of the other bandmembers have heard it yet, and Tuomas is keeping his cards close to his chest.

"The Decades tour has been good fun, but in all honesty my main focus now is on the next year," he states. "For the past six months, that's what I do all the time and think about. Like with the previous albums, you can instantly recognise that all the quintessential Nightwish

"THE NEW ALBUM IS LIKE A GOOD WINE OR CHEESE!"

FLOOR SAYS TUOMAS'S NEW MUSIC IS MATURING WELL

NORTH STAR

Floor Jansen discusses her new rock project, Northward...

HOW DID NORTHWARD COME ABOUT?

"It started about 10 years ago. My old band, After Forever, was going to have a year off and I wanted to make a side-step into rock. I met Jørn Viggo Lofstad [guitarist in Pagan's Mind] at Prog Power festival in the US. I didn't expect to meet somebody to do a rock band with at a prog festival! Ha ha! We played some covers together and I told him about my plans and we gave it a shot. We had that songwriting chemistry."

WHY DID IT TAKE SO LONG TO RELEASE THE ALBUM?

"We spent a year writing it, then the After Forever sabbatical became a permanent stop. I didn't want Northward to be my next thing, so I put it on hold. Then Revamp started, and I got sick for 18 months [Floor suffered from burnout, see *Hammer* issue 306]. So when Nightwish took a sabbatical, I thought, 'Now I'll call Jørn and see if this project's up to standard!'"

DID YOU WRITE NEW MATERIAL OR USE THE ORIGINAL MUSIC?

"We were able to use all of the material that we had back then. We changed some small things, but only rewrote one. With the rest we felt it would be great to release it instead of having it die out. So finally, it's done! I'm actually happy now that I got the time in between, to mature both as a person and musically."

WHAT WAS YOUR GOAL WITH THE NORTHWARD PROJECT, AND WHICH BANDS INFLUENCED YOU?

"I wanted to get to know the rock style better – it was refreshing to sink my teeth into it. I was familiar with bands like Foo Fighters and Skunk Anansie. Halestorm weren't around back then, but it was more their influence colouring it in 2017 when we recorded it."

IS THERE ANYTHING FROM NORTHWARD THAT YOU DON'T GET FROM NIGHTWISH?

"I can't compare it, because the music is so different. I guess with Northward I didn't feel I had to achieve anything, because I'm already living my dream with Nightwish. And with Nightwish, however much creative energy I can use, I don't write the music."

WHAT'S THE PLAN FOR NORTHWARD?

"We have no plans to tour the album or to write a second one. I'm in the middle of a Nightwish tour, and next year we'll be writing the album, plus motherhood, so that's plenty for now! Ha ha ha!"

NORTHWARD'S SELF-TITLED DEBUT ALBUM WILL BE RELEASED ON OCTOBER 19 VIA NUCLEAR BLAST

The Nightwish curry club in full

Sorry, Tuomas – no rest for the wicked!

elements are there, but there are some surprises once again to keep the whole thing interesting, and things that we haven't done before, musically, lyrically and production-wise

"When it comes to songwriting, I always have to have the theme of the song first," he continues. "I can never just start jamming. So maybe I'll read a book or hear a story and I get an urge to tell that story. I like to write about things that interest me, but would also be interesting to the other members – the previous album [2015's *Endless Forms Most Beautiful*] is a good example, because we're all very interested in popular science and biology. Then you decide, what's the best way to tell it – is it a metal song or a ballad? Should it be piano or guitar-oriented? Then I experiment and try to match the music and the theme."

And while Tuomas is the main songwriter, he stresses that the other bandmembers do have input. "When I feel that there is nothing more I can personally give to the piece, I introduce it to the other members of the band," he says. "And then the actual work starts. A lot of songs don't change much from the original demos, but sometimes it goes topsy turvy. I'm no guitarist, or bassist, or drummer – so it happens all the time that they will suggest something and I'll say, 'Excellent!'"

"I think we will all have to wait until next year to hear it, and I'm fine with that," says Floor. "It's quite charming that it's all within Tuomas's world right now – and like a good wine or cheese, it's getting riper. Of course I'm curious, but there's so much happening right now that I'm happy for it to be our full focus next year."

And so back to tonight's performance, and their upcoming European tour that will see them rolling into London, Birmingham and Manchester this December. Bloodstock is treated to a stunning spectacle with huge screens and fireworks (read our review starting on p.100), and the arena shows this winter promise to be even more incredible, with more elaborate production and a longer setlist that will include music from every one of their albums.

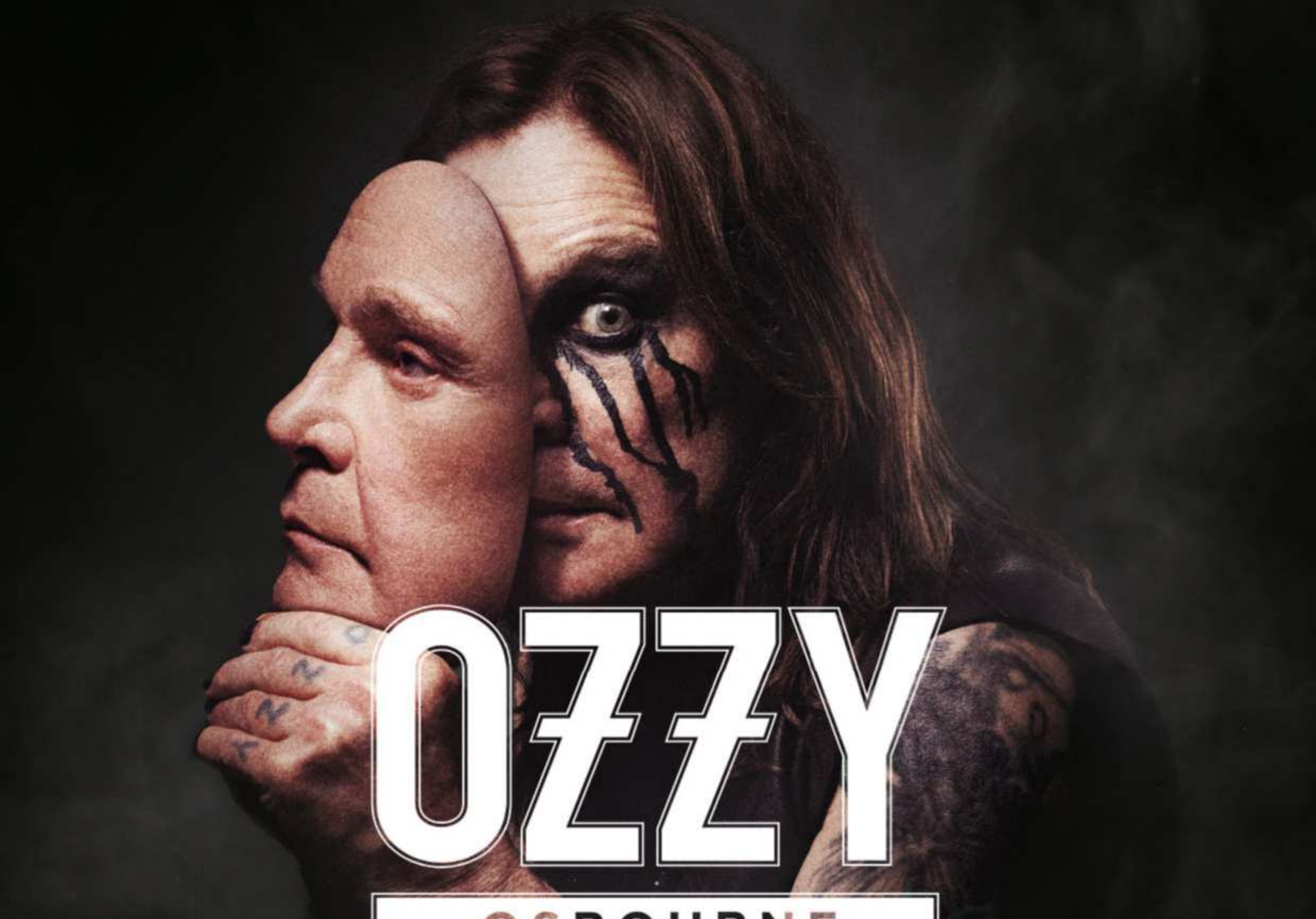
"We have a massive screen behind us and then there are also screens on stage as well, so from the front it looks like we are floating!" says Floor excitedly. "Especially when it's dark... and of course, we have tons of pyro."

Yet for a band that started in the realms of fantasy, Tuomas will readily admit that realism has crept into their lives. "It's such a cliché to say that the band are doing better than ever, but we are doing really good at the moment," he says. "People grow up, have experiences and learn, and we have made a decision to never do a two-year tour again. It's maybe a bit too much."

For Tuomas, this new phase means focusing on longevity and keeping everyone – the fans *and* bandmembers – happy. "This really is something that all of us want to do for the next 10, 15 years even," he says firmly. "But you have to plan in advance and make sure it stays motivational and interesting for everyone."

Judging by the reaction they receive tonight, there is plenty of anticipation for the journey that lies ahead. ✠

NIGHTWISH BRING THE DECADES TOUR TO THE UK IN NOVEMBER. SEE P.109 FOR DATES



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"HE OPENED HIS MOUTH AND SATAN CAME OUT"

DEATH'S MANAGER, ERIC GREIF, REMEMBERS THE FIRST TIME HE SAW CHUCK SING

THE GODFATHER

Twenty years on from Death's final album, *The Sound Of Perseverance*, we remember visionary musician Chuck Schuldiner – the man who pioneered a genre and was taken too soon

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY

Chuck Schuldiner never wanted to be The Godfather Of Death Metal. It was a genre tag he could never shake off during his short life, and one that's only grown in stature in the years since he passed away.

His reticence was understandable. Chuck's band, Death, were conceived in the 1980s as a brutal eruption of noise and viscera, but the course they sailed across their seven-album lifetime took them into uncharted waters. As their singer, guitarist and chief architect, he was one of extreme metal's iconic figures, a restless spirit in perpetual forward motion.

"Death were so far ahead of the curve that other people were playing catch-up," says Matt Heafy, Trivium vocalist and Death fan. "Chuck was so ahead of his time that it became a hindrance. If Death were still around, they'd be massive."

He hasn't been forgotten, but neither is his influence as celebrated today as it should be. With Chuck at the helm, Death produced some of the 90s' most game-changing extreme music. They married the brutal and the progressive, the blood-splattered and the cerebral. His tenacity in the face of adversity – from line-up issues to changing musical trends to the cancer that eventually killed him – was astounding. But if there's one thing he wasn't, it's a self-publicist.

"He always downplayed his part in the extreme metal puzzle," says Eric Greif, who managed Chuck through Death and beyond. "He never claimed that he created anything – he just thought his music was metal, plain and simple. He'd never admit it, but he was a visionary."

It's debatable whether Death were the first death metal band, but it was a close-run thing. San Francisco's Possessed edged them out with their 1983 demo, tellingly titled *Death Metal*. But Possessed crashed and burned within a few years, whereas Chuck persevered with the vision he'd had as a teenager growing up in Orlando, Florida.

Original Death guitarist Rick Rozz first met Chuck at a backyard party in the Sunshine State. "He was a pretty mellow, laidback guy," says Rozz today. "Me and Kam [Lee, drummer] had our band Mantas going, and we started talking to ➤

Another (slightly different) early design by Chuck

One of Chuck's original sketches for the logo

GETTY

Chuck about music. We were only 16, but within a couple of weeks we'd moved our stuff over to his place and dropped out of high school."

Inspired by the nascent thrash metal scene, the trio changed their band's name from Mantas to Death, reflecting their fondness for schlocky horror movies filled with blood, guts and zombies – something Chuck would draw upon for Death's first two albums. He christened himself 'Evil Chuck'. "There was no death metal scene in Florida at all," says Rick. "Obituary weren't together, Morbid Angel weren't together, Deicide weren't together. It was just us at that point."

Eric Greif met Chuck in 1987 at the inaugural Milwaukee Metal Fest. Death's groundbreaking debut album, *Scream Bloody Gore*, had been released that year. A rush of gargled noise, it drew up the template for the underground metal scene grinding into life in the Florida heat. But watching Death play live in Milwaukee, Eric saw the gleam of potential behind the volume and filth.

"I had never been exposed to anything as ferocious as his vocals," says Eric. "In 1987, Tom Araya was considered the heaviest vocalist around. Then Chuck – this handsome-looking guy – stepped onstage, opened his mouth and Satan came out. But offstage he was the opposite of that. He was polite, charismatic, kind of like a character from a Southern TV show: 'How you doing, y'all?', that kind of thing."

Death were only a few years old at that point, but they'd already had several personnel changes – something that would define them for the rest of their career. The original line-up had fallen apart in 1986, after Chuck briefly joined Canadian thrashers Slaughter, though Rick Rozz rejoined for Death's second album, *Leprosy*. The upheaval reached a nadir in 1990, when an exhausted Chuck bailed on a European tour, leaving his aggrieved bandmates to play the dates without him (it was unofficially dubbed the 'Fuck Chuck' tour, to the frontman's ire).

The line-up that made 1995's *Symbolic* album: Gene Hoglan (drums), Kelly Conlon (bass), Chuck and Bobby Koelble (guitars)

"Although it was a band set-up, it was clear that Chuck was the boss," says Eric, whose own relationship with Chuck had its bumps. "Me and Chuck sued each other at one point around the time of [Death's third album] *Spiritual Healing*, then we had another break a couple of years later. Our lawyers rectified everything, and we were good from then on."

Unlike many of his death metal contemporaries, Chuck was a complex person. By the time Death released 1990's *Spiritual Healing*, he was already beginning to outgrow the scene he had helped spawn. That album marked the point where he largely jettisoned the adolescent lyrical concerns of *Scream Bloody Gore* and its follow-up, *Leprosy*, in favour of a deeper, though no less vivid look at the human condition.

"He started out striving for what everyone was striving for at the time – horror and gore and brutality," says Eric. "He was a kid, he loved those kinds of things. But he eventually started to find the brutality in everyday life."

> **"HE FOUND THE BRUTALITY IN EVERYDAY LIFE"**
>
> **CHUCK STARTED OUT WRITING ABOUT GORE, BUT SOON BEGAN WRITING ABOUT REALITY**

An even bigger leap came between *Spiritual Healing* and Death's next album, 1991's *Human*. While it was still anchored in extreme metal, it found Chuck taking the band down new avenues of complexity. For *Human*, he recruited guitarist Paul Masvidal and drummer Sean Reinert of tech-death visionaries Cynic, and Sadus's fretless bass maestro Steve DiGiorgio – a line-up that represented the cutting edge of early 90s metal.

"Chuck grew in an extraordinary way as a musician and a lyricist from album to album," says Eric. "He was going through lots of personal turmoil – relationships with girlfriends falling apart, issues with his parents getting divorced, doubting his own abilities. In a lot of ways Death was cathartic for him. Certainly when we were suing each other, he'd call me up and say

SCREAM BLOODY GORE

Chuck's influence spreads right across metal culture

TRIVIUM
Matt Heafy grew up in Orlando, Florida, a couple of miles away from where Death were formed. "*The Sound Of Perseverance* was my first Death album and I worked backwards," he says. "To call them 'death metal' is limiting. There was so much more to them than that."

VOLBEAT
Mainman Michael Poulsen acknowledges Death as an influence on his pre-Volbeat band, Dominus. "To this day I will say that *Spiritual Healing* is the best death metal album of all time," he wrote in the liner notes of a 2012 reissue of the album.

SLIPKNOT
The Iowans' frontman Corey Taylor was just one of many musicians to pay tribute to Chuck Schuldiner when he lost his fight against cancer in 2001. "Chuck's music was really important to me growing up," said Corey. "It was really intricate and interesting."

DAVE GROHL
The Foo Fighters frontman is a fan of 80s/90s underground metal. He reportedly approached Chuck Schuldiner to appear on his all-star Probot album, alongside Lemmy, Max Cavalera, Tom G. Warrior, King Diamond and many more. Sadly, Chuck was too ill to participate.

VENOM PRISON
Extreme metal's new flag-bearers make no secret of their love of Death. "When you explore genres, you want to see where it started off and that's how I discovered them," says frontwoman Larissa Stupar. "There isn't a bad Death record."

in an angry voice, 'I just wanna let you know that I wrote another song about you.'"

Death's great leaps forward continued through the 90s. The one-two of 1993's *Individual Thought Patterns* and 1995's *Symbolic* (the latter arguably their finest album) were increasingly complex and forward-looking.

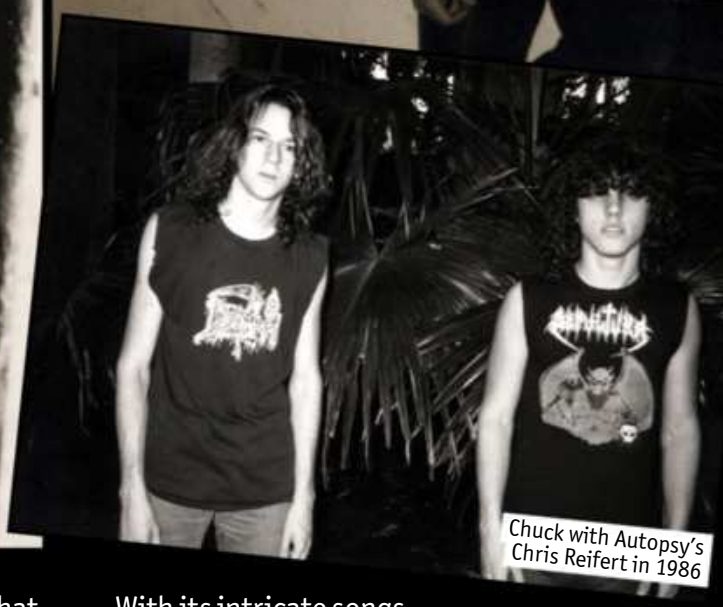
"The way he approached things was so unorthodox," says Matt Heafy. "He'd treat the guitar like a flamenco player. There aren't a lot of bands where you can hear the guitarist play a riff and identify them right away. Zakk Wylde, Dimebag, James Hetfield. And you definitely can with Chuck."

Despite the acclaim that greeted successive Death albums, the 90s were a tough time. Metal was on the back foot, sucker-punched by grunge. The likes of Pantera and White Zombie were keeping the flag flying for metal, but for a band further out on the fringes it was hard.

"I think he'd become disillusioned with the music industry," says Eric. "And I think he was becoming disillusioned with Death, or at least being the singer in Death. He'd say, 'All the music is done, now I have to ruin it with my vocals.' So he decided to do something different."

1998's *The Sound Of Perseverance* was Death's final album – and Chuck's last as a vocalist. Within a year he had ditched the name and launched a new band, Control Denied. Most of the final Death line-up came with him, but there was one key difference: Chuck would focus on playing the guitar, bringing in newcomer Tim Aymar to sing.

Deaths' line-up in 1984: Rick Rozz (guitars), Kam Lee (drums) and Chuck



Chuck with Autopsy's Chris Reifert in 1986

With its intricate songs and Tim's leather-lunged vocals, the band's debut album, *The Fragile Art Of Existence*, veered closer to progressive metal titans Dream Theater than the extreme metal bands that had risen in Death's wake. Sadly, the album's title proved horribly prophetic. In 1999, the same year it was released, Chuck Schuldiner was diagnosed with brain stem cancer. "He chose to fight," says Eric. "His sister took him from doctor to doctor."

When it became apparent that the Schuldiner family couldn't afford to pay for treatment, fans raised tens of thousands of dollars to help pay his medical bills. In January 2000, Chuck underwent a life-saving operation.

"I ran into him at a bar, after his first round of surgery," says Rick Rozz. "He didn't look good; he was dragging his leg behind him. We spent a good three or four hours just sitting around talking. It was cool to see the guy."

For a while, it looked like the treatment had been a success. "He was in remission and everyone thought he was going to survive," says Eric. "But then he took a turn for the worse."

In May 2001, Chuck's family announced that the disease had returned. The metal community rallied round him once again. Heavyweight acts such as Korn, Marilyn Manson and the Red Hot Chili Peppers donated memorabilia for an auction to help fund his medical bills. Trivium, who had formed just a couple of years earlier, played a fundraising show at the Fairbanks Inn in Orlando. "It was just local bands, but it was an honour to be able to do it," says Matt Heafy, who grew up just a few miles from where Chuck co-founded Death all those years ago.

Sadly, it was to no avail. On December 13, 2001, Chuck died, aged 34. "He fought all the way," says Eric, who helped organise a memorial service that was attended by Corey Taylor, HIM's Ville Valo, Dave Grohl and more. Tellingly, despite the occasionally fractious history they had had with their former bandmate, every former member of Death also turned up.

"Even though he seemed to have falling-outs with the musicians in his bands, people at his labels, everyone respected him," says Eric. "Even after all this time, people don't bring up horror stories about working with him."

Chuck had started work on a second Control Denied album before his death. Despite fans' clamour for it to be released, Eric – who was appointed by the Schuldiner family to look after Chuck's musical legacy – insists that the record was barely even begun when he died.

"It never got beyond the simplest demos," says Eric. "He was physically unable to play even the simplest riffs. Finishing it posthumously is nearly impossible. You can't just snap your fingers and expect people to know what Chuck would have wanted."

Even without it, Chuck left a stellar legacy. The eight albums he released during his lifetime were a personal evolution that mirrored metal's own evolution. Today, his legacy can be heard in everyone from Volbeat to next-gen metal torch-bearers Venom Prison. Almost 20 years after his death, the reluctant Godfather Of Death Metal remains as important and influential as ever.

"I meet kids who don't know their roots, their history," says Matt Heafy. "They don't know it, but when they're listening to their favourite band, they're hearing Death in there." ✠

"HE TREATED THE GUITAR LIKE A FLAMENCO PLAYER"

TRIVIUM'S MATT HEAFY WAS IN AWE OF CHUCK'S UNORTHODOX TECHNIQUE

***THE SOUND OF PERSEVERANCE* LIMITED EDITION 3LP REISSUE IS OUT NOW VIA RELAPSE**

Manuel Gagneux: the man behind Zeal & Ardor

RUNNING WITH THE DEVIL

The only thing stranger than Zeal & Ardor's fascinating, bluesy black metal mash-up is the life of the band's mastermind, Manuel Gagneux. We picked the brains of a modern metal enigma

WORDS: ELEANOR GOODMAN • PICTURES: WILL IRELAND

Manuel Gagneux is seven years old when his dad starts taking him to back-alley seances. The participants are members of the Yoruba religion, who perform ritualistic movements while Manuel's father and his friends play hypnotic, repetitive, polyrhythmic music.

"It was pretty freaky and really intense," he remembers, sitting on a couch in *Hammer*'s London HQ ahead of a show with his band Zeal & Ardor. "You get a god ascribed to you when you're born, and a colour. You're only going to get possessed by that god, so you have to learn that dance, and you dance until it's channelled through you. Then you kind of know stuff suddenly and have super-human strength."

We push him for more information, but he won't be drawn.

"Yoruba is really secretive about their processes," he explains, "and it's considered a really bad juju thing if you tell anyone what happened without them actually having experienced one..."

Still, rhythmic echoes of the gatherings can be found on Zeal & Ardor's second record, *Stranger Fruit* – he points to the bassline of *We Can't Be Found* as an example. It's the follow-up to 2016's *Devil Is Fine*, which set out the project's stall, mixing black metal with chain-gang chants and imagining a world in which slaves rebelled against their Christian masters and turned to Satan. Though sparked by a suggestion from online cesspit 4chan to mix black metal with 'n*gger music', Zeal & Ardor is a product of his imagination, incorporating occult literature and his experiences of the world.

"You get ascribed a god, and you're possessed by it"

MANUEL WAS TAKEN TO YORUBA SEANCES FROM A YOUNG AGE

Manuel was born in Switzerland, to a white musician/biologist dad and an African-American jazz singer mum. His parents amicably separated when he was six, and Manuel and his older brother went to live with his mother. He was a quiet child who didn't really like school and kept himself to himself, reading and drawing, while his outgoing mum liked to sing jazz standards *everywhere*.

"We'd be embarrassed by her singing in the supermarket," he smiles. "And I don't mean subtly humming a tune – she would full-on belt out some Nina Simone in the grocery aisle! But I guess it was a good education, and we got contact with valuable, culturally relevant pieces of music, so that was nice."

What was that like for you, as an introvert?

"Not so great. But I think her not giving a fuck was actually quite a nice statement that I can subscribe to now."

Manuel's Cuban-salsa-loving dad also tried to interest him in music, attempting to persuade him to pick up the saxophone when he was eight years old ("I hated it – you could only play one tone at a time, and it felt goofy as fuck!"). When his band supported James Brown in Switzerland three years later, he wanted to introduce Manuel to the funk legend, but the boy wasn't bothered. "I'd got a PlayStation 2 the day before, so I blew him off," he confesses.

As a form of rebellion, Manuel instead turned to rock and metal. His first record was The Offspring's *Americana*, followed by an education in the likes of Iron Maiden, Mr. Bungle, Frank Zappa and Tom Waits. Much to his annoyance, his parents supported his growing passion, but it did mean he received a B.C. Rich Warlock guitar for his 14th birthday. It wasn't long before he got involved in the local punk scene, going to see "weird-ass" bands who had some unusual ideas about showmanship.

"This band at a squat played a game; they had a little person with a helmet on who they threw around. If you caught him, you would be awarded a toilet seat," he flatly recounts, in the voice of someone who's aware of how ridiculous it sounds. "We later found out they'd stolen the toilet seats from the venue, who were pissed!"

There were also generator parties, held at secret forest locations shared by text message. Manuel had begun playing guitar in bands; a Darkthrone-influenced black metal outfit called Atraxiastir who never performed live, and one he refuses to name ("it was experimental, very excited about itself and proud of itself music, kind of prog stuff"). The proggy band would arrive in a haze of weed and alcohol, jamming for unpredictable crowds.

"I saw a lot of puking and a lot of punching," he recalls. "This guy would do visuals for the band because he was into that. Someone hijacked his projector and – I only learned this after the gig – apparently there was some really, really graphic gay porn projected onto us. It was quite hilarious."

In 2009, Manuel's world changed when he was sent to Switzerland's nuclear defence laboratory as part of the country's compulsory national service programme. He hated it, and left for the States after his six-month stint, figuring he'd never go home

to fulfil the rest of his obligations. When he ended up returning in June 2015, he was forced to pay a "hefty fine" and undertake a period of civilian service, where he worked with children. He has two months left, which he'll be completing in a care home next year.

"It's really silly," he says of conscription. "We have an army, and that's so dumb, because the army's pathetic! So if any of our neighbouring countries were to knock on our door, we'd just have to deal, I guess. Also, it's just for men, so there's a weird, sexist edge to it. It's regressive."

"If you caught a little person, you'd win a toilet seat"

THE LOCAL PUNK BANDS IN BASEL, SWITZERLAND, DEVISED SOME WEIRD ONSTAGE GAMES

But his desertion proved fruitful when it came to his music; he worked on electro-pop project Birdmask and then Zeal & Ardor, independently releasing *Devil Is Fine* in 2016. The album was re-released the following year and gathered momentum, prompting Manuel to assemble a full live band. When the PA gave out during their set at Norway's Roadburn festival last April, only their fifth gig, the crowd sang *Children's Summon* like they'd known it forever. Two months later, the band were opening for the mighty Prophets Of Rage on a string of European dates – including a show at London's 5,000-capacity Brixton Academy.

"The thing I took away from it is that the bigger people are, the nicer they tend to be nowadays, which is so refreshing!" he exclaims. "Tom Morello is one of the kindest guys on the planet. He will not stop getting rounds of tequila! Playing in front of such a huge audience was a trial by fire, but a very good one."

Manuel was conscious of Zeal & Ardor's rising status, and the resulting liability of having bandmates, while making second album *Stranger Fruit*. It caused some anxiety. "On the road, there's five people with me who depend on this," he explains. "I consider them really good friends and I want them to succeed in life, so I see it as my responsibility to not make a shitty album."

Stranger Fruit takes this responsibility seriously. Named after Billie Holiday's 1939 song *Strange Fruit* (based on a poem protesting against the lynching of African-Americans, which likened their bodies to strange fruit hanging from the trees), it expands on Zeal & Ardor's black metal sound, incorporating other subgenres and pushing Manuel's rich, bluesy voice to the forefront.

"I really wanted to expand both elements of it, so there's more variation in the metal part and there's more variation in the rootsy part," he says. "I got to explore a little bit more jazz and soul, as well as thrash and death metal… to make a little bouquet, ha ha!"

The record comments on racial violence and inequality in US society, highlighting how they're still prevalent today.

"It more directly references things that are going on right now," he states. "*Stranger Fruit*, for example – '*Stranger fruit /got holes in flesh*' – that is a reference to people being shot in the street by police. And, '*They're out looking for you*' is also about police persecution. What's important to me is that they could be read as metal titles, but also applied to current-day Americans."

However, there's also a liveliness to Manuel's approach to music, as there is to the man himself. He recorded *Stranger Fruit* in the basement of a bar owned by him and his friends, downing copious amount of coffee, energy drinks and herbal tea, and throwing in whatever worked – there's a phrase in German on the song *We Can't Be Found*, added just because it sounds harsh; an Aleister Crowley sample (*Fire Of Motion*); and more references to the occult texts *The Book Of Abramelin* and *The Lesser Key Of Solomon* – not to mention those Yoruba rhythms. It's a mash-up of references that gel as a coherent whole, marking Zeal & Ardor out as an essential band that have gone beyond a bedroom gimmick to a fully fledged proposition.

"This idea won't last forever," Manuel reflects, as we ask what the future holds for this unlikeliest of success stories. "As soon as I have to force it, as soon as it loses the playfulness, fascination and levity, it's time to move on. But I think there's still a bit left…"

***STRANGER FRUIT* IS OUT NOW VIA MVKA. ZEAL & ARDOR PLAY THE UK IN NOVEMBER/ DECEMBER – SEE LIVE EVIL ON P.109 FOR DETAILS**

There's more pressure on Manuel now he's responsible for a whole band

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Fancy another trip inside the mind of Will Gardner?

A NATION DIVIDED

On debut record *Statues*, Black Peaks imagined a bleak dystopian world. With that world fast becoming reality, new album *All That Divides* looks for the hope amid a country enshrined in chaos

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL • PICTURES: MICK HUTSON

In April 2016, Brighton-based quartet Black Peaks released their debut album, *Statues*, its amalgam of mathy hardcore bite and prog-metal song structures underpinning a conceptual linear narrative. It was a cautionary tale of a dystopian future where bankers and huge global conglomerates have destroyed the world's financial landscape, leading to an uprising by the people and resulting in violence, anger, death and the very fabric of society unravelling.

When *Metal Hammer* sat down with the band to talk about *Statues*, we were keen to ask them about the story. As we did, there was a telling insight into the group dynamic of the time; as three-quarters of them sat nonplussed, there was almost a smirk on guitarist Joe Gosney's face as he told us, "Oh… that's just Will's stuff," while looking across at vocalist Will Gardner, who was clearly chomping at the bit to reveal all about the album's grand statement.

Since that day, though, Will's "stuff" has become remarkably, worryingly relevant. Back then, there was no Brexit debacle, no replacing our Prime Minister who put his penis in a pig's mouth with one who runs through fields of wheat, no rise of the alt-right, no reality TV mogul-turned-President of the United States tweeting threats of nuclear war to North Korea, no Windrush scandal, no #MeToo movement, no Grenfell Tower disaster, no Mexican children detained in cages, no UK citizens being

"THERE'S A LACK OF EMPATHY AND PEOPLE ARE LOSING THEIR MINDS"

WILL'S WORRIED ABOUT SOCIETY CRUMBLING IN THE CURRENT CLIMATE

Black Peaks are the closest they have ever been as a group

poisoned by Novichok, no 'Free Tommy Robinson' – in fact, none of the obvious divisions in our society that we are now starting to take for granted. As we sit down with Will today, it's too tempting not to ask, 'What exactly did you predict?'

"It was just a story," he says slowly, shaking his head and widening his eyes. "I had been watching loads of Charlie Brooker's *Black Mirror*. I just wanted to portray a nightmare, the worst-case scenario. I really had no idea that it would all play out like this." He pauses for a second before puffing out his cheeks. "We're actually not a million miles away from it though, are we...?"

"WE SAW DISGUSTING RACIAL ABUSE SCRAWLED ON WALLS"

BLACK PEAKS' LAST UK TOUR WAS A WAKE-UP CALL FOR SOME OF THE BAND

These days, Will doesn't have to delve into science-fiction literature or the dark recesses of his mind for inspiration. Instead, Black Peaks' second record, *All That Divides*, explores the mindset of a group of young men perplexed by the chaos they find their country in.

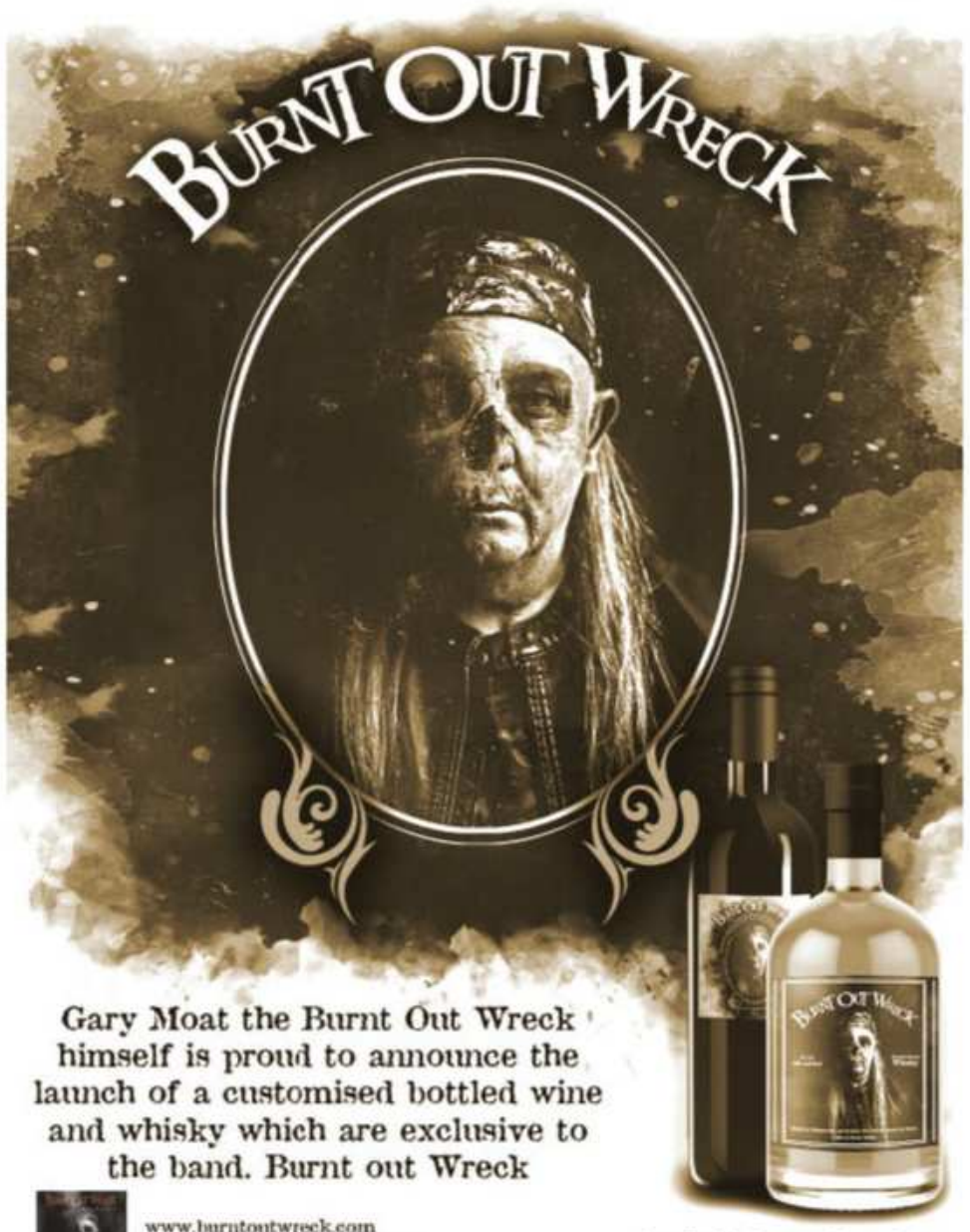
"This album is certainly about our view of real happenings," Will tells us. "It's much more about us going, 'Whoa! Look, stop and take a moment before our society just crumbles.' The last track on the record, *Fate I & II*, is basically about a choice that we can make now: to continue to just be negative, divided and destructive, or to try and rationalise our behaviour. There's a distinct lack of empathy from everyone at the moment. This isn't a political statement as such, just an observation that people seem to be losing their minds."

And it's no longer just 'Will's thing', either. The previously ambivalent members of Black Peaks have found themselves caught up in the fallout and fragmentation of a post-Brexit Britain. Will tells us how the Eastern European partners of both Joe and drummer Liam Kearley have, shockingly, been subjected to racial abuse over the last 18 months.

"And that's in Brighton, too!" scoffs Will, still struggling to process the events. "That's metropolitan, multicultural Brighton. And stuff like that is happening? You know, we toured around the whole country on our last album and you go to some places where you can see some really disgusting racial abuse scrawled on walls, plain for anyone to see. I think it became a wake-up call for the guys when they saw that, and also when people they love were then being subjected to it. It's not just me now – we're really, collectively, keen to try and articulate our frustrations about the things we see."

Those frustrations have changed the way that Black Peaks operate as a band. Will tells us about how they would sit down before rehearsal and discuss how they felt when they watched the news or picked up a newspaper, leading to an agreement of the themes that the new album should take on, and how best to represent those feelings musically. It is, he tells us, the closest they've ever been as a group.

"A lot of credit has to go to Dave," he says in reference to new bassist Dave Larkin, who replaced Andrew 'Goz' Gosden in December 2017. "He has really come in and helped us connect a lot of stuff together that was maybe a little wild on the last record. I would sit down with him and talk him through my lyrics, and he'd pick out words or change a turn of phrase to make it sound better, to make it clearer to people



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'BLACK FLAME'
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Dave Larkin: bass

Liam Kearley: drums

Joe Gosney: guitars, vocals

"THERE'S A LOT OF SADNESS IN THIS ALBUM"

BUT WILL HOPES IT'S NOT TOO LATE FOR PEOPLE TO SET ASIDE THEIR DIFFERENCES

and to make it feel like it's really hitting that place that I want it to hit emotionally."

All That Divides definitely sounds like the work of a band who are a more integrated unit. Where *Statues* was schizophrenic and untamed, *All That Divides* condenses the Black Peaks sound into a more expansive yet tightly focused attack. On the album's highlight, the near-seven-minute-long post-metal journey of *Aether*, there is no trace of their previous hardcore leanings to be found. Instead, the likes of Opeth, Gojira, Mastodon and even Tool are recalled to devastating effect.

"I'm really proud that we're able to do a song like that," Will smiles. "I heard the music for it before I had put any vocal lines to it and it was really intimidating. It was odd, I was so proud of the guys with coming up with this incredible piece of music, but I didn't know what the fuck I was going to do over the top of it. We went in one night and just went for it, did the whole thing in an evening on pure adrenaline, and I'm so happy with how it came out."

The stripping away of hardcore influences on the album is one of the many things that appears to be manoeuvring Black Peaks away from where their British peers currently reside; it's hard to think of another band from our isle that could make an album like *All That Divides*.

"It's what we have to do; it's what Biffy Clyro did and look at where they are now," shrugs Will. "The scene in this country is really great at the moment. We've got so many great friends in great bands but, with all respect to them, we don't want to be like them. If they're all here then we want to move over there."

He holds up one hand still and moves his finger on the opposite hand around wildly as he explains this. It's certainly a further step away, and a distance that's likely to increase over time, especially if Black Peaks continue to indulge in Will's more unusual interests.

There aren't many bands in the UK underground that will happily talk to you about the influence of a rogue BBC documentary film maker on their music.

"Adam Curtis is a visionary," Will says. "Some documentaries take a very passive and noncommittal view on their subjects, but he just tears our society apart! You realise that the businesses and the government and, particularly, the media are totally corrupt. He's like the anti-bullshit philosopher of our time. This album is massively inspired by his work. Certainly, in terms of having no filter to expressing how we feel. It's actually quite a scary thing to be doing, because you're speaking out against a machine that is so omnipresent in people's lives and it could crush you with, just, pure lies if it wanted to. I do worry about that if we were to get any bigger. But then, I guess you have to make choices, don't you? How much fire do you want to play with...?"

This more intelligent and thoughtful approach is what sets Will's band apart from the pack. It would have been easy, after writing one album that was fictionally furious at the world, to write a follow-up that was equally as angry but for genuine reasons. But it's not what Black Peaks have done.

"There's a lot of sadness in this album," says Will. "The first one was about destruction and anger, and this one is more about sadness at where we are. And hope. Hope to where we can go. There's that line in *Aether, 'I can see through the clouds there's a change, I feel your pain.'* And that's the hope, that we all start to see from each other's perspective again, because it's not too late."

Will was right before – let's just hope he's right again.

***ALL THAT DIVIDES* IS OUT ON OCTOBER 5 VIA RISE RECORDS/BMG.**
BLACK PEAKS TOUR THE UK IN OCTOBER/ NOVEMBER – SEE P.109 FOR DETAILS

WHO IS ADAM CURTIS?

BAFTA award-winning documentary filmmaker Adam Curtis came up through the ranks at the BBC and has made a career documenting what he describes as "power, and how it works in society". Here are Will's starting points for those looking to explore his work

The Century Of The Self (2002)
Adam's four-part series studied the way Sigmund Freud's methods of psychoanalysis have been manipulated by governments and corporations to their own ends. It looks at the way we've been encouraged to see ourselves in a more superficial light, defined by consumerist desires. *Love Island* fans might wanna skip it.

Bitter Lake (2015)
A documentary on the methods that politicians have applied to Islam to craft a simplistic 'Good vs. Evil' narrative, intertwining it with information about Western relationships with Russia and Saudi Arabia, in an attempt to provide the viewer with a deeper contextual and historical narrative. Perfect Saturday night viewing, basically.

HyperNormalisation (2016)
Here Adam argues that the world's most powerful people have long given up on the idea of the complexities of the 'real world' and have instead created a simplistic 'fake world' run solely by the world's largest corporations and kept stable by politicians. Featuring a guest appearance by Ant and Dec... No, of course not really!

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HOW BRIT METAL ALMOST RULED THE 90s

NAPALM DEATH: MARTYN GOODACRE/GETTY IMAGES

Heads-up! A stagediver at a Napalm Death gig at London's ICA in 1990

Homegrown metal should have reigned supreme in the 90s, but nu metal stole its crown. We track down the era's forgotten bands and the survivors who live on today

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

August 17, 1996 was a good day to be a British metal fan. The sun shone on the hallowed turf of Donington Park, and tens of thousands of metalheads made the annual pilgrimage to witness a reformed and re-made-up Kiss headlining that year's Monsters Of Rock alongside Ozzy, Sepultura and many more. Plus, while the mainstream was wrapped up in 'Cool Britannia' and the Brit-pop phenomenon, our metal bands had been thriving; Carcass, Napalm Death, Bolt Thrower and more were all doing fine business, despite the threat of grunge that had killed off so many of their US peers.

"It was incredible when you think back," reflects Nick Holmes of Yorkshire doom merchants Paradise Lost. The band had broken out of the underground, been tipped as the next Metallica and, with 1995's classic *Draconian Times* in their back pocket, were added to the Main Stage line-up. "We always dreamed about playing there. We don't really get that excited by anything, to be honest, but that was pretty special after all the work we'd put in."

Everything seemed set up for a moment of coronation for the new breed of British metal, a springboard to the next level for our scene… but, of course, that isn't what Donington '96 is remembered for. A few hours after Paradise Lost stepped offstage, Korn arrived to headline the second stage of the festival, their incredible, day-stealing performance triggering the forthcoming domination of the as-yet-untitled nu metal movement.

Almost overnight, the pendulum swung back in favour of the USA: nu metal became the biggest movement on Earth, Carcass split, Bolt Thrower were plagued by line-up changes, Paradise Lost rejected metal for synth-pop, and a generation of young, vibrant British metal bands ended up being treated almost exclusively with apathy and ignorance for half a decade.

"It was a really great scene back then, because it was so underground," smirks Orange Goblin frontman Ben Ward. "You'd go see Electric Wizard or Cradle Of Filth in [south east London's] The Amersham Arms and Barney would be handing out flyers for Napalm Death gigs. We didn't think about commercial concerns, because there was no chance of it. Everyone sort of knew each other and got along whatever music they were playing or into."

> **"I SAW ALL THOSE OTHER BANDS AND THOUGHT 'SMILING ISN'T METAL, IS IT?!'"**
> **NICK HOLMES WAS UNIMPRESSED BY NU METAL'S BRASH IMAGE**

Orange Goblin in 1998. Still going strong and now dressing slightly better

We may have invented metal, but there was no place for the more dour, straightforward British stereotype in the nu metal scene that was taking over in the late 90s.

"It was funny to see the change in the scene," says Paul Catten of Herefordshire-based metallic hardcore band Medulla Nocte. "We were coming from the punk scene and it just hit a point where you'd suddenly see all these people in baggy jeans getting piercings and dying their hair blue or whatever."

It's safe to say that, for some of the bands that had enjoyed success in the early 90s, nu metal was an unwanted addition. Nick Holmes remembers being backstage at a festival during the years of Korn and Limp Bizkit's dominance.

"They were brash and loud," he laughs. "I didn't know who these bands were, but I saw a bunch of guys all smiling and high-fiving each other and wearing multicoloured clothing. I remember thinking, 'This ain't metal, is it?! Smiling!'"

The British bands of the time were not anti-American, but they did take their influences from other areas of the US scene. "We loved American bands and were hugely influenced by them," Karl Middleton of Nottingham post-metallers Earthtone9 explains. "But our problem is that we weren't influenced by hip hop. We were taking bits of Corrosion Of Conformity and Kyuss, and there was very little of that in what was popular at that time. The band from our scene

we really looked up to was Pulkas; they had this very British, almost Killing Joke, kind of vibe."

Pulkas were one of the first bands to turn heads in the press during the dominance of nu metal. Although they were short-lived, the band splitting with no fanfare shortly after the release of 1998 debut album *Greed*, they were arguably the first band from our shores that had the audacity to take the fight to America, leaning heavily on the atmospherics of Tool and the textured groove of Deftones or Helmet. They wouldn't be the last.

"I remember when Pitchshifter signed to Geffen," says Karl, still awed all these years later. "One of our bands signing to an international major was a game-changer. Everyone re-evaluated the possibilities of what they could achieve."

Pitchshifter were undoubtedly the biggest band of this period, their evolution from underground, Godflesh-worshipping industrialists to major-label drum'n'bass punks as surprising as it was exciting. Their 1998 album, *www.pitchshifter.com*, was their first to feature clean vocals.

"I didn't want to make another record with grunting vocals," Pitchshifter vocalist JS Clayden explains. "The guys were gracious enough to let me present more varied vocal and song ideas. I believe British anything can be successful if it has structural support. Unfortunately, that support had to come from the USA. Only Geffen were adventurous or dumb enough to back our brand of experimentation, so we took the money and ran."

Pitchshifter's success seemed to make the door creak open, and trickles of British bands, such as anglo-Irish rap-metallers One Minute Silence and industrial northerners Kill II This, began to experience a modicum of success – albeit in guises that borrowed from the US metal sound du jour.

"I lost interest as that decade progressed," says Napalm Death's Barney Greenway, who appeared on Kill II This's *Deviate* album in 1998. "The spark that made heavy music interesting wasn't there for me anymore. So we went back to being inspired by the things that originally inspired us, and if we did take anything from 90s music it was more stuff like Sonic Youth."

But progress was being made. In December 1999, British/Gibraltan post-grungers Breed 77 opened for Black Sabbath at their one-off show at the Astoria, and Kill II This opened for Slipknot at their legendary debut UK show there. At the same time, One Minute Silence were out as main support to Machine Head on their Burning Red tour, and then played on Slipknot's first-ever UK tour. Once again, though, it was Pitchshifter who were the trailblazers. They were added as the opening band on the bill of the inaugural UK Ozzfest at Milton Keynes in 1998, proving that British bands could hold their own if given the chance.

"That was a trip," JS Clayden remembers. "We learnt a lot on Ozzfest. Love them or hate them, the American bands took no prisoners – they killed it like it was their last show at every gig."

While Pitchshifter had the industry infrastructure in place to rise to the challenge of playing alongside the American behemoths, many of their peers didn't, and the thrill of being placed on a bill with some of the biggest names in metal didn't last long when the reality of the situation was made apparent.

"It's the old adage: be careful of what you wish for," says Karl, when asked about Earthtone9's experiences of touring with the likes of Soulfly and Glassjaw. "We soon realised that without the

Paradise Lost circa 1997. Smiling ain't metal, according to Nick Holmes (centre)

Pitchshifter in 1999. They came *this* close to being megastars

Earthtone9 at the Knaack Club in Berlin. Their problem was they were more Kyuss than Korn

Pitchshifter have always killed it live

PARADISE LOST: MICK HUTSON/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES. PITCHSHIFTER: PHOTO BY NAKI/REDFERNS
EARTHTONE 9: SNAPSHOT-PHOTOGRAPHY/ULLSTEIN IMAGE VIA GETTY IMAGES

Stampin' Ground circa 2000: any band who can out-Hatebreed Hatebreed deserve your attention

RIFF BRITANNIA

Five essential late-90s Brit metal albums

PITCHSHIFTER
www.pitchshifter.com (1998)
A quantum leap from their early industrial gruntings, Pitchshifter added more melody, loads of classic punk rock and some genuinely cutting-edge electronics to their metallic riffing. The results were as exciting as anything that the US were sending our way, and it nearly, so very nearly, made them stars.
LISTEN TO: *Please Sir*

PULKAS
Greed (1998)
One of the bands that leaned heaviest on the sound and aesthetic of 90s groove metal. *Greed* was a wonderful debut album, capturing the rhythmical, gut-punching power of Sepultura and the brooding, stop/start intensity of Deftones. They also looked cool as fuck. Shame they packed it all in within months of the album's release.
LISTEN TO: *Rubber Room*

IRON MONKEY
Our Problem (1998)
The most nihilistic band of the late 90s. Iron Monkey took the sludge metal of New Orleans hatemongers like Eyehategod and Acid Bath and gave it a punky, grey, rainy Midlands edge. Frontman Johnny Morrow's seething vocal delivery put them a few steps above everyone when it came to outright intensity.
LISTEN TO: *Supagorgonizer*

EARTHTONE9
arc'tan'gent (2000)
So influential there's now a festival named after it, *arc'tan'gent* could stand toe-to-toe with *White Pony, Toxicity, Lateralus* or any of the other landmark records of the time. It was filled with beautiful harmonies, jarring, progressive song structures, technical wizardry and a unique blend of humour and oddness that was all theirs.
LISTEN TO: *Star Damage For Beginners*

STAMPIN' GROUND
Carved From Empty Words (2000)
Born from the UK underground hardcore scene, but embraced by metal bands of the time, Stampin' Ground took the rough edges of metallic hardcore from their peers in Knuckledust and xCanaanx and gave it a level of precision and Slayer riffage the UK hardcore scene hadn't managed. Even today, this album out-Hatebreeds Hatebreed.
LISTEN TO: *Officer Down*

STAMPIN' GROUND: NAKJ/REDFERNS. IRON MONKEY: PHOTO BY NAKJ/REDFERNS

machine you need for touring behind us, we couldn't compete. We can't complain about our label and the small budget we were on, but ultimately, you're being put in front of the first few people through the door who don't know your stuff and might not necessarily be interested in what you're trying to do."

"I loved the challenge," smiles Paul Catten when remembering Medulla Nocte's stint as the opening band on, again, a Soulfly tour. "You see your name on the poster with the bloke who used to be in Sepultura and you think, 'Bloody hell! This'll be good!' But I remember building up the London show in my head, and when we got onstage there were only about 30 people in the building! We still played well, mind."

While most of the British bands were swimming against the tide of the American onslaught, one band vehemently went out of their way to alienate themselves from everyone: Nottingham's Iron Monkey. Their blend of New Orleans sludge, mixed with British grit and driven by the inhuman, nihilistic belch of iconic frontman Johnny Morrow, made them a band to look up to.

"They were something else," laughs Paul, who formed Murder One with Johnny in 2001 after the break-up of their own bands (Johnny sadly passed away shortly after). "The first time I saw them, I had to laugh; this quiet, polite guy that I'd met before the show was up there making all these noises! And they didn't give a fuck. Bands all say that, but Monkey were proper punk rock."

Iron Monkey: NOLA sludge + Brit grit = winning combination

By the dawn of the new millennium, most of the lower tier of British bands had split up due to a lack of interest. Those that were continuing suffered from diminishing returns, but Earthtone9 gave the scene its definitive parting shot with the *arc'tan'gent* album. This sprawling masterpiece should have catapulted them to the highest of heights, but instead they split just over a year after its release.

"We were really happy with the record," says Karl. "We didn't know that it'd be thought of as our 'magnum opus', we just felt we were getting closer to our initial vision. But it wasn't working as a unit; it was actually a relief when we split."

At this point, it was difficult to see whether British bands would ever gain international traction, but a phenomenon had been building behind the scenes.

"We did a gig in Newport in 1997 and it was packed," Paul tells us, shaking his head. "It was us headlining and the drummer from this band Public Disturbance told us that his new band were opening for us. All these girls were in the crowd, and this band played and then they all left, and we played to hardly anyone! Ha ha ha! I knew then that they were on to something."

That drummer was Ian Watkins and the band were Lostprophets. Due to obvious circumstances, we're loathe to go too far into their story, but they were the first British rock band in a decade that connected on a larger scale. Their debut album, 2000's *thefakesoundofprogress*, was re-released on a major label the following year.

"They were the right mix of discord and melody at the right time," says Jon. "Nu metal, as soon as the costumes were better than the music, was bound to self-destruct. An audio macrophage feasting on its own flesh."

As nu metal flooded the mainstream, the metal world looked around for something new. The Dillinger Escape Plan's visionary masterpiece *Calculating Infinity* arrived in 1999, and ushered in a new attitude to music. Suddenly the dirtier, angrier, more progressive and noise-based likes of Meshuggah, Botch, Candiria and many more shifted focus away from the ludicrously over-the-top third wave of nu metal and, slowly but surely, being British no longer reduced you to second-class citizen status. Corby-based sludge metal sextet Raging Speedhorn came within touching distance of the UK top 40 singles chart, Watford tech oddities Sikth suddenly found themselves being played on Radio One, and the likes of Hundred Reasons and Funeral For A Friend, and later Bullet For My Valentine and Gallows, put heavier British music back where it belonged… to the point where, 21 years after Paradise Lost stepped out onto the Main Stage at Donington Park, one of the original members of British metal's 90s underground scene did the same.

"It was hugely satisfying," says Ben Ward of Orange Goblin's appearance on Download 2017's Main Stage. "After all these years of toil, we are taken seriously. People like Andy Copping, who books Download, can rely on a homegrown metal band to stand among the world's biggest acts. You look at us and at Electric Wizard, and we've grown from that scene I was talking about earlier. We never could have imagined that day coming back then, but if we've played our part in helping it to where it is now then I'm happy with that."

"WE CAN STAND AMONG THE BIGGEST ROCK ACTS IN THE WORLD"

ORANGE GOBLIN HAVE PLAYED DOWNLOAD'S MAIN STAGE

The late 90s may not have been the most commercially viable time to make metal in this country, but without the grassroots underground scene, we may not have reached a point where we hold the likes of While She Sleeps, Bury Tomorrow, Venom Prison, Black Peaks, Employed To Serve and the rest in such esteem.

"I wouldn't want to comment on the artistry of others too much," says JS Clayden to sign off. "But I think that Pitchshifter and Earthtone9 were underground bands that made music from the heart and didn't have to pretend to write ballads to make more money. From my perspective, our music was a genuine and stentorian voice that came out by necessity rather than any nonsense designed to fill our bank accounts."

PITCHSHIFTER AND EARTHTONE9 TOUR THE UK IN NOVEMBER. SEE P.109 FOR DETAILS

TRIAL BY FIRE

When Caleb Shomo's demons returned, he confronted them by travelling, leaving the comfort of his Ohio basement for a life-changing journey. The result is scathing new Beartooth record *Disease*

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

They say travel broadens the mind, but it's also a killer way to stoke the creative fires. In November 2017, Beartooth's Caleb Shomo embarked on a solo, global journey to make the band's third album *Disease*. Over several weeks, the frontman hopped between New York, Los Angeles and Tokyo, soaking up the energy and bright lights and drawing inspiration from the unfamiliar.

The trip was a leap into the unknown, pushing him resolutely out of his comfort zone, namely the Ohio basement where he had always written the band's music. Furthermore, it marked the first time he had recorded a Beartooth album in a proper, bells and whistles studio. It's an experience the vocalist describes today, back at home and taking a break from mixing B-sides to chat with *Hammer*, as "nerve-wracking."

"MAKING THIS ALBUM WAS NERVE-WRACKING"

CALEB LEFT THE COMFORT OF HOME TO RECORD IN NEW PLACES

"I wanted to get a different vibe on this record," he explains, recalling the moment his label, Red Bull Records, suggested sticking him on a plane and packing him off across the world, along with a videographer to record the process for social media. "Obviously writing at home is very comfortable and very safe. I love writing in my basement, but I had this opportunity and access to some incredible studios throughout the world. I chose LA and New York City just because I really love spending time there, but I rarely get to. And then Tokyo was this whole different animal. There was this rock bar that I'd been to with Crossfaith before; I went for a drink and the bartender started asking what I do. I told him who I was and he was like, 'Cool. My friend is DJ'ing down the road, do you want to go?' So we went and it was just the craziest thing I'd ever seen, 400-500 people packed into this little club all just dancing and going ballistic."

Caleb will freely admit that *Disease* is the most difficult record he's ever made – but the challenge wasn't just limited to a change of scenery. As with Beartooth's previous albums, 2014's *Disgusting* and 2016's *Aggressive*, he wrote every track, recorded vocals, guitars, bass and drums, and produced the album, alongside executive producer Nick Raskulinecz (Alice In Chains, Korn, Deftones). However, in order to create the raw, nervy tension that roars throughout *Disease*, he headed to Blackbird studio in Nashville, renowned for its huge collection of vintage gear, choosing to record everything for real with minimal digital interference. It wasn't long until he wondered whether he'd bitten off more than he could chew.

"I hadn't tracked drums in forever. I'd gone into some of these studios and was playing for a while, and I was like, 'Jesus Christ, I am not as tight as I need to be,'" he admits. "Same with guitar. I got beat down and it put me in my place. The amps would be buzzing too much and I was like, 'Fuck me, I can't fix this afterwards, I need to fix it now.' It was definitely more of an analogue, raw process, how people would make records 20 years ago. It meant I had to perform and really play way better than I have on the other records. I really think I stepped up to the challenge at the end of the day, but it took me a while to get in the headspace."

Fans are only just reaping the aural rewards of Caleb's efforts, but the truth is the seeds for *Disease* were sown years before Caleb landed at his first stop, NYC. The last time *Hammer* caught up with the band, it was mid-2017 and Beartooth were in the midst of a USA tour. All seemed well: they were still on a massive high following debut *Disgusting* (an album which Caleb states was "exactly what I'd wanted to make"), and playing sold-out shows off the back of 2016's follow-up *Aggressive*. And yet, behind the scenes, cracks were beginning to show. Caleb alluded to a period of depression that had taken hold while on the road, but only now does he reveal just how far down that downward spiral he had fallen.

A few months prior in Europe, the mental health problems that had plagued him since he was seven years old had slowly started to creep back in. One night in Finland in December 2016, in the peak of the polar winter, he suddenly realised his demons were right back in the room with him. "This culmination of shit

Beartooth (left to right): Oshie Bichar, Connor Denis, Caleb Shomo, Kamron Bradbury, Zach Huston

really hit me at once, kind of like a train," he remembers. "It was really late at night, I couldn't sleep and it truly was the first time I'd felt suicidal since… God knows how long. I was like, 'Holy shit I gotta figure this out and I got to deal with this.' I don't want that to ever be in my mind as an option again."

Right there, in the most desperate of moments, the concept for *Disease* came to him; the importance of acknowledging the black dog and confronting it head-on. Two months later, he was in the studio recording the album's title track, a song which includes the lyric: *'If I fall again, will it be the end?'* Clearly, however painful and frightening, that despair had sparked a light bulb of reflection and self-realisation, resulting in some of Beartooth's darkest lyrics to date.

"I realised I'm always going to deal with these feelings," he explains. "They just do not go away, no matter what I do. It's all about learning to manage them. *Disease* is me being done with ignoring and going to those places in my mind that I hate to go to, in the hope I can figure out more about myself. I felt very lost after the last record cycle. I'm not trying to hate on my own record, but it felt like that whole process was so fucking fast. I enjoy *Aggressive*, but I think there were some things that slipped through the cracks in the recording process. I had just come off two years plus of touring and went straight into the studio. I didn't really have a minute to breathe."

The phrase 'travel to find yourself' is the ultimate cliché, but it's somewhat true for Caleb – when we ask him what he's learnt about himself during his travel experience, his answer is emphatic. "I just need to be OK with who I am as a person and accept all the things that make me fucked up," he replies. "I am a person that is unsure and a person who is unhappy a lot of the time."

On the other hand, despite the challenges he's faced, today Beartooth's founding father is incredibly positive and excited for what the future holds. "Whatever it takes for us to get more pyro onstage, that's what I want!" he laughs. "We did a show with pyro on our last record cycle and now I'm addicted to it. Look at Parkway Drive, the most kick-ass show ever. I feel like ours would be a lot less organised, though – just pyro everywhere. There would be bottles of lighter fluid and we'd just light each other up and run around until someone puts us out with an extinguisher."

Jokes aside, though, there's no mistaking the pride in Caleb's voice when he talks about *Disease*. "I set out to do something very specific and I wasn't sure if I was going to be able to pull it off," he admits. "The record ended up being exactly what I wanted. Now that might not mean it's a masterpiece to the rest of the world, but to me, it's the best record I can make at the moment. I don't think I have anything else in the tank – this is everything I've fucking got."

***DISEASE* IS OUT SEPTEMBER 28 VIA RED BULL RECORDS**

"I FELT SUICIDAL AND I DIDN'T WANT IT TO BE AN OPTION"

CALEB FACED THE DEPRESSION HE'S BEEN STRUGGLING WITH SINCE AGE SEVEN

I ♥ JAPAN

Caleb wrote some of *Disease* in the Land Of The Rising Sun. He explains why it's one of his favourite places to visit

YOU PLAYED JAPAN IN 2016 WITH CROSSFAITH. WHAT WAS THAT LIKE?

"People go fucking crazy over there. It's unlike anything else. You say 'jump', everybody in the venue – balcony, floor, wherever – will be jumping. You say 'hands up', every hand goes up in the air. You say 'sing', they'll sing even if they don't know it. Tokyo might be my favourite city to play shows in, period."

WHAT WAS YOUR RECENT EXPERIENCE LIKE, WRITING *DISEASE* IN TOKYO?

"I was in Japan for about nine days, just me and a videographer. I fell in love with the city, the people and the culture. Even though the place is so crazy and fast-paced, the energy is quiet and chilled, and I think that more than anything helped me dive into some deeper lyrics."

WERE THERE ANY TOUGH TIMES?

"There was a day I got really sick. I went out with my buddies and we tried a bunch of crazy food. That threw me off. I had a few days in Tokyo that were really tough to get through, just random spouts of depression. It was tough to have that going through my head while I was having such a cool experience; I almost felt really bad about it, but that again showed on the record."

CAN YOU RECOMMEND ANY COOL JAPANESE BANDS THAT WE SHOULD CHECK OUT?

"SiM are a crazy-ass band. We played a show with them and they're wild."

Caleb wants Beartooth shows to have more pyro, like Parkway Drive

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SLASH
FEATURING MYLES KENNEDY AND THE CONSPIRATORS

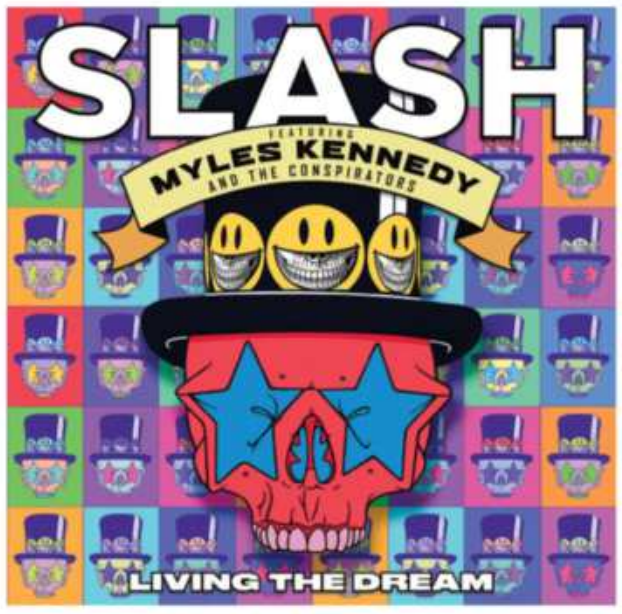
Living The Dream
SNAKEPIT/ROADRUNNER

Iconic axeslinger makes a bid for the history books

IN THE FINAL scene of Christopher Nolan's 2008 Batman epic *The Dark Knight*, police commissioner Jim Gordon famously tells his son that the enigmatic crime-fighter is "the hero Gotham deserves, but not the one it needs right now." Similarly, Slash's new solo album – his first since 2014, when the prospect of him making peace with Axl Rose and embarking on a multi-year, half-a-billion-dollar-grossing world tour with Guns N' Roses seemed like nothing more than a comic book fantasy – might not be the record we deserve, but it is apparently the one we need right now, even if we didn't realise it.

It will be a shame, however, if people dwell on what *Living The Dream* isn't, and overlook what it actually is: namely, the Aerosmith record fans have been begging that band to make for decades. Featuring a dozen impressive, well-crafted tracks that would each elevate the quality of a rock radio station's playlist considerably, *Living The Dream* is a far more digestible listen than its sprawling, 77-minute predecessor, *World On Fire*. It's also a scintillating flashback to an era when bands with big-voiced frontmen and their hotshot guitarist sidekicks ruled the planet, and, as songs such as *Sugar Cane* and *Driving Rain* prove, the dynamic duo of Slash and Myles Kennedy could likely hold their own against the heroes of generations past.

The record opens with the anti-technology barn-burner *The Call Of The Wild*, which features many of the album's trademarks: a sneering, uptempo riff that simultaneously nods to both



garage rock and funk; a memorable chorus with walls of vocal harmonies; and a seemingly effortless solo that spotlights the skills of a guitarist who, despite his iconic status, probably doesn't get enough credit for his routinely pitch-perfect playing. There's even some cowbell thrown in for good measure. From there, *Serve You Right* – the lyrics of which were reportedly inspired by a painting of a masturbating nun hanging on the bathroom wall of Slash's recording studio – sees the guitarist do his best impression of Jimmy Page via a bluesy Britrock riff that drips with barroom bluster. It's a fun track, but it pales in comparison to its successors, *My Antidote*, which recalls the unmistakable swagger of *You Could Be Mine*, and the AC/DC-like, balls-out boogie of *Mind Your Manners*. Other notable tracks include *Read Between The Lines*, the best song Jimi Hendrix never wrote; the long-distance love story *Lost Inside The Girl*, which is arguably the album's most adventurous cut; *The Great Pretender*, the lyrical guitar lines of which would surely earn Slash the right to score *The Godfather Part IV*; and the soaring melodic ballad *The One You Loved Is Gone*, the type of lighter-waving anthem that made bands' careers in the late 80s.

Considering the overwhelming success of GN'R's Not In This Lifetime tour, there was no real need for Slash to make this album. Whether he did so out of loyalty to Myles Kennedy and his fellow Conspirators or whether he's playing mental chess to force Axl's next move is irrelevant, for in the end, *Living The Dream* is Slash's finest moment since Snakepit. Long may it continue.

8

FOR FANS OF: Guns N' Roses, Aerosmith, Alter Bridge

CLAY MARSHALL

Slash, Myles and The Conspirators deliver a dream of an album

SLASH

GUITAR

WHAT DOES THE ALBUM TITLE MEAN TO YOU?

"It was a bit of sarcasm towards the politics of the world at large, mostly the US but other stuff that's happened. It wasn't about 'I'm living the dream', although in some ways it's appropriate – it was really a stab at the geopolitical and sociopolitical events of late."

WHAT REAL-WORLD EVENTS FED IN TO THE ALBUM?

"The title is one thing, but we don't really dwell on addressing any political stuff in the songs themselves. I'm not one of those people who wants to impart my opinion on anybody; the songs are more personal, and Myles wrote all the lyrics and they're more about our personal lives at the moment."

WHAT WERE YOU LISTENING TO WHEN WRITING THE RECORD?

"There were new records like the new Foo Fighters, Prophets Of Rage and QOTSA albums, but I was listening to a lot of assorted blues stuff on a regular basis. Gary Clark Jr, Albert King, BB King, Stevie Ray Vaughan – I put blues guitarists on Pandora and I leave it on all day."

HOW DO YOU TRY TO MAKE THE CLASSIC ROCK SOUND FRESH AND EXCITING FOR A 2018 AUDIENCE?

"I'm not trying to do something retro, I'm just trying to do what I've always wanted to do, and I'm doing it this many years later and still finding new ways to do stuff. You're making a record and you're going for a sound that you're trying to make in that moment, and it's really just an extension of when I first started; it's been about making the sound that you want to hear and not trying to recreate the wheel. There are things I don't hear other people doing that I'm trying to get myself to do."

DEEP CUTS

A CLASSIC QUARTET FROM SLASH'S SOLO CANON

It's Five O'Clock Somewhere

GEFFEN – 1995

After Axl rejected demos he'd recorded after the *Use Your Illusion* tour, Slash recruited Jellyfish vocalist Eric Dover, Alice In Chains bassist Mike Inez and GN'R bandmates Matt Sorum and Gilby Clarke to bring Snakepit to life.

Ain't Life Grand

KOCH INTERNATIONAL – 2000

Featuring a completely different line-up to Snakepit's debut (including current Coop guitarist Ryan Roxie), the now out-of-print *Ain't Life Grand* saw Slash and co proudly fly the flag of classic hard rock in an era of limp, korny roaches.

Slash

ROADRUNNER – 2010

With Velvet Revolver on hiatus, Slash prepared his debut solo album, including guest vocalists Ozzy, Lemmy and Alter Bridge's Myles Kennedy. Myles was then asked to front Slash's touring band, a partnership that continues today.

Live At The Roxy 25.9.14

EAGLE ROCK – 2015

Each of Slash's three live albums have merit but …*Roxy* includes the broadest cross-section of his solo work, such as *You're A Lie*, *World On Fire* and *Bent To Fly*. Don't miss the 17-minute rendition of *Rocket Queen*.

Coheed And Cambria: once more unto the breach of The Amory Wars

COHEED AND CAMBRIA

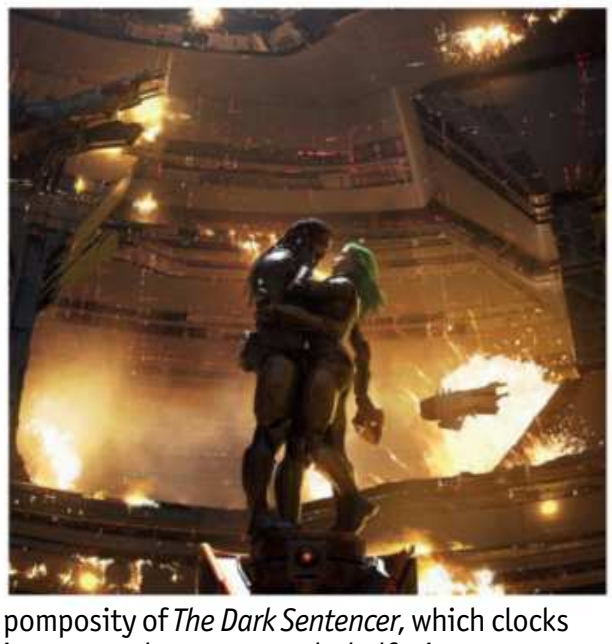
The Unheavenly Creatures

ROADRUNNER

New York's prog sci-fi visionaries return to the warfront

THERE WAS AN audible murmur of surprise and discontent from Coheed And Cambria fans when it was revealed that 2015's *The Colour Before The Sun* album was to be their first stepping away from the Amory Wars concept that the band had been developing since their formation in 1995. They really shouldn't have worried. With the band sounding revitalised by the fresh approach, they turned in their strongest collection of songs, at the very least, since 2005's *Good Apollo, I'm Burning Star IV, Volume One...*, and arguably of their career.

But there was never any suggestion that Coheed And Cambria wouldn't return to The Amory Wars, and they have confirmed that *The Unheavenly Creatures* is a continuation of the story. This time, from what we can deduce, the story centres around two lovers' – the title's aforementioned unheavenly creatures – journey through the burnt-out remains of planet Earth, now being run by an elite society who have turned it into a prison planet. Classic Coheed, in other words. Fans of the band's more proggy soundscapes will also doubtless be pleased that the return of the narrative structure has led to some of the more complex elements of Coheed's sound reappearing. The near-six-minute *The Gutter* has a full-blown Rush-style freak-out in the middle, and the album opens – after a long, booming spoken-word intro – with the soaring epic majesty and



pomposity of *The Dark Sentencer*, which clocks in at more than seven and a half minutes.

It's clear that Coheed And Cambria are more than happy to be back on comfortable ground. That being said, one of this band's greatest gifts is their ability to coax all kinds of memorable hooklines and melodies out of, and amongst, their dense, sprawling sci-fi prog. And when *The Unheavenly Creatures* soars it's hard to imagine there is another band that can marry these two elements quite so perfectly. The title track is reminiscent of a weathered version of the lovesick *Feathers* from *No World For Tomorrow* with extra 8-bit bleeps thrown in for good measure. It's dirtier but still a potential anthem of the future, and the gang chant and military drum tattoo that accompany frontman Claudio Sanchez's breathless waltz of a vocal at the close of *Black Sunday* is a moment of breathtaking quality whatever your taste in music.

Although it would be disingenuous to suggest that there aren't lulls for the casual fan towards the end of an album of 15 tracks – of which most rarely dip below the five-minute mark – this does feel like a successful return to a more progressive sound for a band who were obviously at something of a crossroads in their career a few years back. But it's telling that the finest moment on the record is the one-two punch of *Love Protocol* and *The Pavilion (A Long Way Back)*. Both would have fit fairly comfortably on *The Colour Before The Sun*, the former trading lo-fi guitar ticks for a skyscraper power ballad chorus while the latter is a driving, hard rock banger full of chunky riffs and lush orchestration.

Ultimately the success of *The Unheavenly Creatures* will depend on your own personal preference on Coheed And Cambria's back catalogue, but whatever your poison, there's plenty of evidence of their undoubted quality on show here.

8

FOR FANS OF: **Thrice, Rush, Thursday**

STEPHEN HILL

BEYOND THE BLACK
Heart Of The Hurricane
NAPALM

Replenished symphonic metallers head for the shallows

Just a few months after these German symphonic metallers released their well-received 2016 album, *Lost In Forever*, all of the musicians suddenly quit, leaving vocalist Jennifer Haben as the only member. The line-up was quickly replenished and this marks the first studio outing of Beyond The Black v2.0. Although the band's sound has always been less orchestral and bombastic than that of their peers, *Heart Of The Hurricane*'s lead single and title track hinted at an energetic, but more generic pop-metal direction – an approach that is disappointingly repeated throughout the album, especially on *Million Lightyears, Fairytale Of Doom* and *Scream For Me*. Both *Hysteria*, which could pass for an Epica track, and *Beneath A Blackened Sky* are ornately embellished with choirs and symphonic drama, and provide the album's highlights, but you still get the distinct impression that Beyond The Black are yet to fulfil their true potential. **5**

FOR FANS OF: Epica, Nightwish, Within Temptation

DANNII LEIVERS

BRANT BJORK
Mankind Woman
HEAVY PSYCH SOUNDS

Former Kyuss drummer turns back the clock

Forming the defining desert rock band of our generation has left Brant Bjork with an unshakeable association and, some might say, a lot to live up to. Echoing jams from Kyuss on his first solo outing, *Jalamanta*, put the double-B on the right foot and, via albums of desert-spangled acoustic, poppish tunes, whacked-out mantras and desert rockin', the somewhat mixed bag that is Brant Bjork has always been fundamentally a hippie ride. Which leads us to *Mankind Woman*. After a smattering of guitar-driven offerings on Napalm Records Bjork's latest has gone full-on retro and daresay the sort of stuff an older generation would like. His Steppenwolf-era flashbacks are visceral on *Nation Of Indica* and groovy on *Chocolatize*, and, where *Pisces* sounds like an open letter of emotional torment, the lightly thumping blues journey of *Pretty Hairy* is effortlessly cool. **6**

FOR FANS OF: Cream, Wooden Shjips, Kyuss

HOLLY WRIGHT

BLACK MIRRORS
Look Into The Black Mirror
NAPALM

Belgian rockers add a lysergic edge to their boogie

Attempting to prove there's life in the Belgian scene beyond the Church Of Ra, Black Mirror's 2017 *Funky Queen* EP revealed a penchant for high-octane tempos, but lacked the depth and vitality to make a memorable impression. Their debut full-length, however, is a completely different affair. Tight and emphatic, it flaunts a gratifying lack of restraint, hitting its stride on belters like *Shoes For Booze* or *Günther Kimmich*, erupting with rowdy, fist-pumping riffs. Elsewhere, the band infuse well-worn classic rock tropes with trippy flecks of psychedelia and silvery dynamics as on *Inner Reality* and *Moonstone* – a lush, elegiac ballad that builds into a luminous climax. But at its core, *Look Into The Black Mirror* is all about meaty power grooves and big rock action. This is the record you'll put on when the party is fading and you need a double-dose of boogie. **7**

FOR FANS OF: QOTSA, Left Lane Cruiser, MaidaVale

JOE DALY

THE CROTALS
Horde
TENACITY MUSIC

Swiss post-metallers veer off the familiar paths

Coming at this cold there are a few things to consider. First of all: the name. Not only does it whiff of the testicular, but it suggests you might be getting a scabby-backed punk act. Not so! The Crotals in fact play post-metal: a genre that, in 2018, seems rather out of puff. Again: not so! *Horde*, for all its familiar elements, goes beyond lumpy riffs and bellicose roars, weaving in a strong sense of glowering, near-physical atmosphere. Then, just when you think they might be getting too surly for their own good, they lob in some stoner rock bounce that could sound ridiculous in less capable hands but, here, teeters between amiable and threatening. It's a strange and not entirely perfect concoction, but hats off for crafting an album that brings something fresh to such a well-trodden style. **6**

FOR FANS OF: Suma, Knut, Dvne

ALEX DELLER

Live at the Royal Albert Hall... then behind the scenes... then live again...

ALTER BRIDGE
Live At The Royal Albert Hall
NAPALM

Hard-rocking heroes suffer symphonicus interruptus

ALTER BRIDGE FANS can be forgiven for feeling a sense of déjà vu. But, while *Live At The Royal Albert Hall* is dropping less than a year after *Live At The O2 Arena*, the once-in-a-lifetime circumstances surrounding this release more than justify its existence. Not only was it recorded in an incredibly prestigious venue, but it was done so while Florida's arena-filling favourites were flanked by the 52-piece Parallax Orchestra. It's a performance that feels like Alter Bridge taken to the extreme, with both the drama of their melodic metal anthems and the emotion of their ballads amplified by an epic, symphonic backdrop. Thus, tracks like *Blackbird, The End Is Here* and *Fortress* – which balance heavier choruses with more sombre verses – excel the most here. They all cruise through soaring highs and crushing lows, before achieving a climactic and earth-shaking catharsis previously untapped in the studio. Myles Kennedy's solo acoustic rendition of *Watch Over You* makes for a sorrowful apotheosis, transforming a normally subdued song into a cinematic supernova.

However, the DVD's insistence to regularly stop the concert so it can inject behind-the-scenes footage can grow tiresome, and will leave viewers reaching for the fast-forward button. Instead of having the show and the making-of as separate features, they're jammed together, making the experience feel disjointed. While the video provides the stunning display of masterfully shot camerawork, if you're a fan who only desires to feel the larger-than-life power of this spellbinding evening, the CD is your best bet. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Soundgarden, Metallica, Shinedown

MATT MILLS

THIS MONTH IN METAL *ALBUM MONOLITHS FROM THE VAULT*

SOUNDGARDEN *BADMOTORFINGER*
A&M *OCTOBER 1991*

Metal Hammer's reviewer, James Sherry, was amazed that *Badmotorfinger*, Soundgarden's third album, could be both fresh and exciting, yet rooted in the past. "If Led Zeppelin reformed now and had an obsession with anything grungy, this is what they would sound like," he wrote in a glowing four-out-of-five critique that heaped praise on such tracks as *Rusty Cage, Jesus Chris Pose* and *Outshined*. "Soundgarden were the first of all the Sub Pop Records bands to really hit the mainstream, and on listening to this album it's easy to see why," James concluded. "There is definitely something strange in the water being drunk by those Seattle bands. Get some of it over here, please."

Attan: brace yourselves!

ATTAN
End Of
FYSISK FORMAT
Primal raging Norse marauders set the hardcore template ablaze

THERE MUST BE something in the ice in Norway because the country has been exporting some seriously destructive, heavy music as of late, and Attan are just the latest to emerge with a sound so grim and merciless everything it touches turns to tar. What starts ostensibly as a hardcore record evolves and mutates into an unrecognisable beast by its climax, having dragged you further into the dark, tormented recesses of Attan's collective conscious. Never allowing you breathe, the opening four songs are less than three minutes long each, rocketing through in a chaotic, breathtaking flurry and removing any sense of comfort. But it's when they deviate from this formula that the Norsemen show their true colours, worshipping at the altar of post-metal overlords Gojira, permeating everything with crushing heaviness. Hypnotic guitars and rumbling bass form the backbone for Attan's brand of nihilism and despair, and the seismic riffs on *Black Liquid Marrow* will send your whole upper body into an involuntary rocking motion, with the guttural, crooning bellows sounding like a giant singing on its way to work in the morning. The dual vocal attack of Remi Semshaug Langseth and Fritz Pettersen is what makes Attan stand out amongst other 'blackened hardcore' bands right now, able to add another deeper, scarier dimension to their emotional onslaught. From *In Our Image* to *Ghostwriters*, there's an untamed, primal aggression, harking back to sulphurous basements of the 90s, but weighed down by a love of sludge. The title track is where Attan truly embrace what they truly are. It's raw honesty, an admission of weakness, a dark and personal ode to all that is heavy, and we're just observers, drowning in an abyss of transcendent riffs and Thor-like vocals. If Mastodon hated the world and forgot that prog existed, this is what it would sound like.

8

FOR FANS OF: **Conjurer, Mastodon, Converge**
LUKE MORTON

THE CRUEL INTENTIONS
No Sign Of Relief
INDIE RECORDINGS
West Coast rocker returns with a punk-fuelled vengeance

A decade ago frontman Lizzie DeVine was shooting videos with Bam Margera and playing gigs at Kat von D's famed tattoo parlour with his band Vains Of Jenna. Caked in eyeliner with bikini-clad babes hanging off his shoulder, he looked every part the new age Nikki Sixx. Now he's back with The Cruel Intentions, spitting venom about the world with the disillusion of someone who's made a few mistakes. Lizzie's raspy snarl is a key part of *No Sign Of Relief*'s vibe, which blends the confident punk aesthetic of Wildhearts with some pop-punk jams and Sunset Strip sleaze. *Go Fuck Yourself* is a filthy, upbeat middle finger that's less concerned with being sleazy and more intent on smashing up the party. *'I'm gonna break your face'* is a cheeky warning on the rock'n' rolling *Jawbreaker* but, unlike some guyliner brigades out there, The Cruel Intentions probably mean it.

7

FOR FANS OF: **Crashdiet, Mötley Crüe, Wildhearts**
HOLLY WRIGHT

ELECTRIC CITIZEN
Helltown
RIDINGEASY
Ohio's intoxicating rockers steam ahead of the retro pack

While we still wait for a fully functioning time machine to be invented, the groovy retro-rock stylings of Cincinnati's Electric Citizen offer a plausible alternative. 2016's *Higher Time* ripped open a whirling portal back to metal's smouldering origins when bellbottoms, jamming and heavy psychedelics ruled the scene. On their latest outing, guitarist Ross Dolan again conjures the kind of thick, druggy riffs that pay homage at the altar of Iommi without devolving into rote mimicry. But it's his wife, vocalist Laura Dolan, who launches Electric Citizen's music far ahead of the retro pack with a deep, soulful range that effortlessly moves between the roaring snarl of belters like *Ripper* and *Cold Blooded Blue* and the spectral purr of *Father Time*. The signposts remain familiar, but behind memorable songwriting, incendiary fretwork and Laura's stunning vocals, *Helltown* marks an all-time high for these voyaging Ohioans.

8

FOR FANS OF: **Lucifer, Blood Ceremony, Kiss**
JOE DALY

FORMING THE VOID
Rift
KOZMIK ARTIFACTZ
Expansive stoner/siudge adventures from Louisiana voyagers

Just over a year since they released their last album, *Relic*, Louisiana's Forming The Void present their fourth full-length, *Rift*, and it's a colossal, dynamic slab of hook-laden riffing. Displaying an elaborate musical tapestry that swirls from devastatingly heavy riffs on opener *Extinction Event* to hypnotising swings on monolithic epic *On We Sail*, the quartet waste no time in sinking their teeth in, and the experience is emphatic. Even when the record unveils its more progressive elements, abandoning the intensity in favour of brooding and instrumental-heavy passages as found on the stellar *Transient*, Forming The Void are able to maintain the suffocatingly dense atmosphere. With these little quirks and delicate intricacies peppered across the record helping spice up their sonic platter, *Rift* is very much an organic and elaborate offering from a band whose potential is fast becoming realised.

8

FOR FANS OF: **Mastodon, High On Fire, Baroness**
JAMES WEAVER

AAND?
wWoof?
SELF-RELEASED

A very British take on The Locust's staccato skronk mayhem, these morphsuited maniacs' six-track EP replaces satire with deliberately asinine anarchy, adds tectonic plate-shifting grooves, a menagerie's worth of animal interruptions and a barrage of glorious delirium to boot. **[8]**

JONATHAN SELZER

EARTH GROANS
Rehab
SOLID STATE

South Dakota's Earth Groans deliver mercilessly heavy, calculatedly crafted and spirited dissonant metallic hardcore with raging vocals and a religious undertone that drives everything they do. This EP takes their stimulating fury to a whole new level. **[8]**

NIK YOUNG

LOWLIVES
Burn Forever
SELF-RELEASED

There's a distinct Nirvana-esque whiff about this three-track EP from Lowlives, from ex-The Defiled frontman Lee Villain (Stitch D)'s glass-gargling howl to the dirty riffs and mottled bass on *Thieves*. And that's no bad thing at all. **[7]**

DANNII LEIVERS

GRAVE DIGGER
The Living Dead
NAPALM

It's business as usual for the German veteran metallers

Still led by their founding vocalist Chris 'Reaper' Boltendahl, these persistent Germans have racked up 19 albums of trad-meets-thrash-meets-power-metal ferocity – notwithstanding a spell during the 80s when, seeking to broaden their appeal, they renamed themselves firstly Digger and then a cringe-inducing Hawaii. With a style so long established, fans know exactly what to expect from Grave Digger – baroque, Bierkeller-friendly melodies, searing guitars, pummelling drums and lyrics of blood, warriors, zombie dances (!), hymns to the damned and odes to the power of metal – all articulated by Reaper, whose voice is becoming gruffer and deeper with each passing year. The result sounds rather quaint and cute, though obviously that's hardly the effect that Grave Digger are craving. **5**

FOR FANS OF: Running Wild, Rage, Iron Savior

DAVE LING

GREEN CARNATION
Last Day Of Darkness
PROPHECY PRODUCTIONS

Kristiansand crew herald the rebirth of a prog metal benchmark

Long before prog rock was rehabilitated into the mainstream consciousness, Green Carnation released a one-song, 60-minute album that is quite rightly revered as an ageless classic. This 90-minute concert film and documentary recounting the Norwegians' 15th anniversary performances of *Light Of Day, Day Of Darkness* in 2016 only became possible thanks to crowdfunding, which proves how absurdly overlooked the original album remains. The documentary itself is both a touching tribute to the personal tragedy that inspired founder Tchort to write the record and a wonderful hymn to the devotion of all those who found and embraced the album's emotional depths. The show itself, captured in the band's home city of Kristiansand, sounds and looks phenomenal; it's no wonder that Tchort sings the praises of everyone involved. A masterpiece, reborn in splendour. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Katatonia, Opeth, Anathema

DOM LAWSON

HANGMAN'S CHAIR
Banlieue Triste
SPINEFARM

Gallic doom crew head out on a deeply personal tangent

Hangman's Chair play doom, but in their own unique way. Their style is gritty; based in the Parisian suburbs of their youth and ravaged by chaos, drugs, death and loneliness, *Banlieue Triste* speaks of horror and disorder. *04/09/16* is an extraordinarily personal tale of a bandmember's drug overdose while *Sidi Bel Abbes* is dedicated to the life of former guitarist Sid-Ahmed Azzouni and his burial place. *Naïve* opens up Cedric Toufouti's gorgeously affected voice with pure emotion while the guitars drive the song forward on dark tones and bittersweet melodies. A collaboration with current French darling Perturbator on *Tired Eyes* is tasteful rather than overbearing, his synths adding shades of tragedy to an already heartbreaking work. Hangman's Chair have always pushed their brand of doom away from the norm and *Banlieue Triste* is a full realisation of their distinctive sound. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Anathema, Alice In Chains, Katatonia

CHERYL CARTER

IRREVERSIBLE MECHANISM
Immersion
BLOOD MUSIC

Progressive metal mastery from the hills of Minsk

Belarus's Irreversible Mechanism return with a second full-length as they embark on a journey into even deeper progressive territory. *Immersion* strikes a balance between dissonant complexity and melodic impact, and the results are songs like grandiose The Contortionist-esque two-parter *Existence I* and *II* and the furious *Abolution*; replete with vicious, mid-song bursts of modern death metal. There are pulverising beatdowns and propulsive moments of face-melting velocity, but frontman Ilya Studenok is the star, his vocal delivery encompassing soaring fragility and brute strength. It's apparent that the five-piece have taken a step up in terms of musicianship as they flow from the ambient ethereality of *Limbo* through to jarring rhythms and razor-sharp tech-death passages. Irreversible Mechanism have continued to push sonic boundaries in order to walk their own unique and creative path. **7**

FOR FANS OF: The Contortionist, Opeth, Ne Obliviscaris

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

ALBUM THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

DARK VADER
Galactic Empire

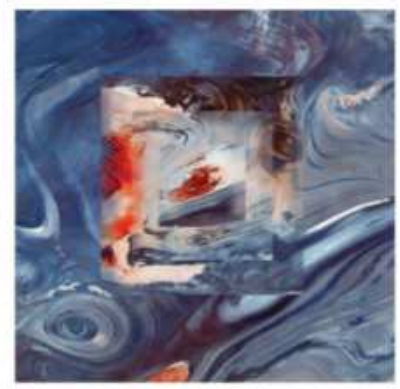
METALLICA
Ride The Lighting

"My first transition into Earth's heavy metal genre was with Metallica. Few riffs pack more punch than those within the song *Creeping Death*. Plus, it brings back fond memories of Order 66. *'DIE! BY MY HAND! I CREEP ACROSS THE LAND! KILLING ALL THE JEDIIIIIII!'*"

Black Peaks: leaving everyone else in their dust

BLACK PEAKS
All That Divides
RISE

Brightons' progressive metallers raise the bar



AFTER RELEASING AN exceptional debut album in 2016's *Statues*, Black Peaks' follow-up arrives with hefty expectations hanging round its neck. Anyone questioning if the Brighton post-rockers could soar over the high bar they'd set themselves got their answer when they released first single *Can't Sleep*. A thunderous and knotty vortex of melody, texture and aggression, it recalled the searing precision of its predecessor while clearly forging a new path forward.

On *Statues* the Brighton quartet took the progressive mindset, majesty, savagery and elegance of Tool, Mastodon, The Dillinger Escape Plan and Oceansize and moulded them into something raw, yet utterly unique. On *All That Divides*, what's startling is how confident Black Peaks now sound playing with influences that would overwhelm most bands. Navigating these songs is an exhilarating thrill, exploring a maze of splintered twists and dynamic shifts, trying to anticipate the quartet's next move but ending up somewhere completely different. On highlights *Aether* and *Home*, the band have left space to let the melodies breathe and build to wild-eyed, and, in the case of the former, string-led climaxes. Fear not, though, heaviness is never compromised. It's just now the band wield it like a weapon, holding it back and unleashing it at exactly the right moment for maximum impact. *Electric Fires* sounds like Biffy Clyro's *Infinity Land* having a pop at *Crack The Skye* while Will Gardner's eviscerating vocals are superb throughout, shifting from a gentle murmur to a skin-peeling howl in the blink of an eye. And to think they've gone and topped the whole thing off with closer *Fate I & II*, a track of such expertly crafted scope and dynamism it leaves your head spinning. After that, the only thing left to hear is the sound of everyone else choking on Black Peaks' dust. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Mastodon, Tool, Oceansize

DANNI LEIVERS

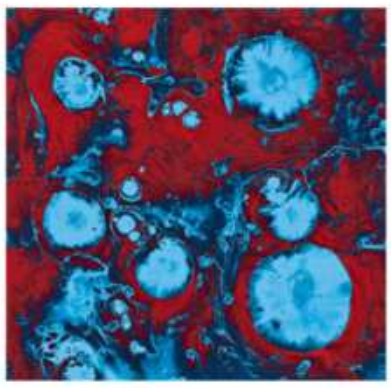
The Black Queen: prepare to lose yourself

THE BLACK QUEEN

Infinite Games

FEDERAL PRISONER

Puciato's synth-driven venture enters a dystopian realm



THE BLACK QUEEN'S debut, 2016's *Fever Daydream*, propelled the Los Angeles trio onto the world's radar with its beguiling synthesis of early 80s synthpop, coldwave and industrialised precision, showcasing an emotionally intense compositional outlook alongside a steadfast refusal to pay lip service to genre conventions. The inclusion of The Dillinger Escape Plan frontman Greg Puciato would intrigue metalheads, while the album's expression of passion and individualism acted as the hook, encouraging them to embrace the experience.

Blindsided by personal and professional upheaval – equipment thefts, Chris Cornell's suicide while Greg toured alongside him to name a few – in the two years post-release, *Infinite Games* is as much an act of refusal to recoil in the face of adversity as it is a statement of intent. This is a genuine labour of love, and an expansive journey into the dystopian sphere of pulsating rhythms, chilling ambience and disarming minimalism, incorporating more influences and unsettling experimentalism than ever before. Clocking in at barely two minutes, opener *Even Still I Want To* works more like a distorted soundbite, painting a troubled vision and laying a foundation for the sumptuous *Thrown Into The Dark*, which evokes the driving electronica of decades past and present. Laden with penetrating melodies, icy r'n'b instincts and throbbing basslines, *No Accusations* and *One Edge Of Two* are the most outwardly pop-centric tracks on offer; Greg's seductive crooning (*'There is nothing I want more than to die with you next to me'*) during the former evokes Nine Inch Nails *Closer*-era Trent Reznor with both lovingly mashing analogue synths with glitchy wobbles showcasing this band's unparalleled knack for composing lush, anthemic choruses. Delve deeper, however, and the light gives way to darkness, for carved around the shimmering neon veneer you'll also encounter glitchy mid-track interludes and schizophrenic bursts of white noise. Turn it up and be prepared to lose yourself; *Infinite Games* is a shining example of fearless eclecticism.

8

FOR FANS OF: Nine Inch Nails, Puscifer, Depeche Mode

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

KOMATSU

A New Horizon

ARGONAUTA

Dutch stoner rockers find plenty of fuel for their trip

The ability to write a great riff and hard-hitting lyrics and to get inside a listener's head is a fine art, and one that Dutch band Komatsu clearly possess. They wear their stoner rock influences firmly on their sleeves having cemented their sound on their previous two albums, and here they've expanded their musical palette experimenting with more instrumental tracks and a rawer, grittier production. Opening track *I Got Drive* showcases their talent to write muddy, brooding riffs mixed with memorable, undulating melodies, while the following *Prophecy* goes full-on Mastodon with its woozy lead guitars mixed with waspish riffs. After a strong opening, Komatsu push boundaries further with *Surfing A Landslide*, an instrumental that sounds like Kyuss mixed with Ghost. Diverse yet consistent, *A New Horizon* will surely appeal to old-school stoners and latter-day Mastodon fans alike.

7

FOR FANS OF: Mastodon, Queens Of The Stone Age, The Sword

CRAIG HUNTLEY

MAYAN

Dhyana

NUCLEAR BLAST

A Prague Philharmonic-fuelled banquet with an ego-stripping agenda

A pair of Dutchmen – Epica's Mark Jansen and ex-After Forever keyboardist Jack Driessen – formed Mayan almost a decade ago, setting out to make a record that harnessed symphonic colour and hard-rocking power with the brutality of extreme metal. Since 2011's debut, *Quarterpast*, Mark and Jack have made steady yet unremarkable progress, but album number three sees Mayan's dreams coming true. At last they mix their wares with genuine classical musicians, namely The City Of Prague Philharmonic Orchestra of *Star Wars* and Dimmu Borgir's *Death Cult Armageddon* fame. Clean, operatic-tinged vocals and growls sit side by side with blastbeats and sweeping panoramic soundscapes as a 13-piece male and female line-up grapples with a concept of "remaining aware of our thoughts and removing egoist tendencies". Ignore such pretentiousness should you prefer; just grab some headphones and get lost in the music.

7

FOR FANS OF: Epica, Therion, Diabolis In Musica

DAVE LING

MOONSPELL

Lisboa Under The Spell

NAPALM

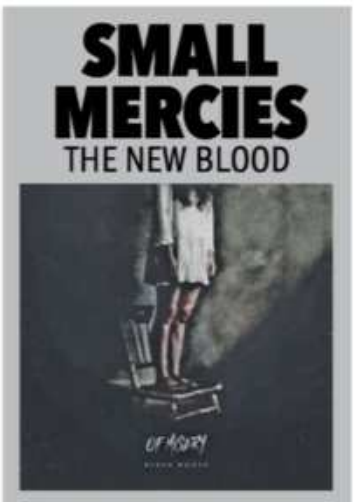
Portugal's gothic metal kings share the spoils

Revelling in the flamboyance and passion that has driven them forward for decades, Moonspell's show at Lisbon's Campo Pequeno Arena in February 2017 was a typically opulent affair, as Portugal's biggest metal band performed *three* studio albums in full, to their most diehard, homegrown supporters. It's hard to imagine anyone feeling shortchanged by these vital and fiery renditions of classic early works *Wolfheart* and *Irreligious*, or a precise and commanding thunder through 2016's excellent *Extinct*; Moonspell have long been instinctive shapeshifters, but there is a clear and glowing red line that links ancient epics like *An Erotic Alchemy* and *Full Moon Madness* with their more contemporary counterparts. The result is that this truly fulfils its brief of being a joyous celebration of one of metal's most criminally underrated bands, not least because it all looks and sounds incredible. What a band.

8

FOR FANS OF: Cradle Of Filth, Paradise Lost, Epica

DOM LAWSON



OF MISERY

Black Noose

SELF-RELEASED

Nailing deathcore's filthy basics with great alacrity, this Australian crew's bonecrushing take on the genre slams with relentless ferocity. Downtuned riffs chug with unparalleled rage before overcast ambience takes this EP to a dark place. **[7]**

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

TENEMENTS

What Doesn't Kill You Is Only Getting Stronger

SELF-RELEASED

It's important for bands not to outstay their welcome, and most people would probably consider eight tracks far too many for an EP. In Tenements' case, however, one track of this sloppy, personality-free post-hardcore is probably too much. **[3]**

STEPHEN HILL

TORQUED

Resurgence

SELF-RELEASED

Groovy and guttural seems to be Torqued's MO for most of this six-track EP. But, as evidenced on the opening of *I Die Inside*, they can use subtlety too when the mood takes them. **[7]**

STEPHEN HILL

NONPOINT
X
SPINEFARM

Florida veterans rediscover their focus, if not their numeracy

Although the album title might suggest otherwise, *X* is *not* the Florida band's 10th album; it's actually their 12th in a career that goes back to 1997. Let that bit of misdirection pass, because what matters more is that, after a period of seemingly losing their musical compass, Nonpoint are back on course. *X* offers nothing new but the songs here are well constructed, allowing Nonpoint's penchant for nu metal, ragga and cutting melodies to shine through. Vocalist Elias Soriano pushes though with performances that sound both fresh yet also world-weary in the best possible sense. With this to guide them, the rest of the band strike out with confidence. From the pent-up fury of *Passive Aggressive* to the dark menace of *Wheels Against Will* and the vulnerable confusion of *Feel The Way I Feel*, this album delivers.

7

FOR FANS OF: Linkin Park, Skindred, Stone Sour

MALCOLM DOME

THE PRIMALS
All Love Is True Love
SOUTHERN LORD

Darkest Hour and Dead To Fall members revisit their youth

Vocalist/guitarist John Blakemore Henry, bassist Chad Fjerstad and drummer Andrew Black may be recognisable names from Darkest Hour, Dead To Fall and The Explosion, but with The Primals they're showing their age – meaning the trio are paying musical tribute to the music they independently discovered as pimply teens and, given they're in their mid-to-late 30s, that means fuzzy, loose and angsty grunge. John, who's been monosyllabically barking for nigh-on 25 years while fronting melodeath urbanites Darkest Hour, surprises with a gravelly, Cobain-esque rasp while offering riffs that combine *Bleach*'s ascending/descending half-step movements with melodies pulled from the American Midwest's 90s screamo scene and the Ramones' sock hop style. However, the 10 tracks on offer don't synthesise these with much effective power and the excitement ignited by John's vocal prowess becomes muted by blanched familiarity and unfortunate ordinariness.

6

FOR FANS OF: Nirvana, Jawbreaker, Mudhoney

CONNIE GORDON

PROGNOSIS
Definition
SELF-RELEASED

Prog metal debutants strike a fruitful balance

From the second opener *High Road* kickstarts to the sound of a swanky, Tool-like bass guitar, it's abundantly clear that *Definition* is going to be an exhilaratingly outside-the-box debut. By mixing technically gifted prog metal with the sludgy grooves of Mastodon and the diverse vocal attack of melodic metalcore, the quartet's first LP makes for the perfect union of unpredictability, brutality and catchiness. Twisted and punishing riffs like those on *The Sycophant* and *Drones* make for the album's adrenaline-fuelling apexes with fingers wildly dancing over fretboards and the percussion constantly driven and furious. The lengthy and slow-burning *Waste* is guaranteed to get progressive elitists salivating, while the clean-cut *Downfall* happily supplies a more anthemic counterpoint. The short spoken-word piece, *Legacy*, feels somewhat out of place but, as only one minute out of 40, it does very little to dampen *Definition*'s glory.

8

FOR FANS OF: Mastodon, Tool, Slugdge

MATT MILLS

PYREXIA
Unholy Requiem
UNIQUE LEADER

New York's seasoned death metallers continue to hold the fort

Pyrexia may not be the first name to spring to mind when you think of US death metal, but their 10th effort is able to trade blows with the best in the business. Opener *Angels Of Gomorrah* is a monstrous statement of intent, and across the album's eight tracks, the New York quartet deliver a bludgeoning and vicious aural assault. *The Annointed* boasts riffs of neck-snapping ferocity while *Moment Of Violence*'s chugging rhythms reek of Suffocation – unsurprising considering the shared DNA over the years. Pockmarked by punishing guttural vocals from Jim Beach, this is an album that sticks religiously to the death metal blueprint. Sure, it may lack in innovation, especially when held against the genre's most forward-thinking outfits, but, there is no doubting that this is a solid and unforgiving effort from one of USDM's most underrated names.

7

FOR FANS OF: Suffocation, Malevolent Creation, Dying Fetus

JAMES WEAVER

LAST ALBUM BOUGHT

TATIANA SHMAILYUK
Jinjer

OPETH
Ghost Reveries

"I bought it as a birthday present for my elder brother, because it hadn't yet been included in his collection. I don't know if he ever checked it out, but I became an even greater Opeth fan after I listened to this album hundreds of times."

High On Fire: all set to make you brick it

HIGH ON FIRE
Electric Messiah
EONE

Matt Pike ratchets up his war cry

WITH THE RECENT return of pothead godheads Sleep (barely six months separate their unexpected comeback LP *The Sciences* from *Electric Messiah*'s release), it seems that Matt Pike has been able to siphon off any and all of his slower, trippier, stoner groove instincts into his old teenage doom trio. This has left High On Fire free to ratchet up the frantic speed and bludgeoning chaos on their eighth album. Even though the previous two albums – 2012's *De Vermis Mysteriis* and 2015's *Luminiferous* – were also produced by Converge's Kurt Ballou as they scampered along with a caustic bloodthirst, *Electric Messiah* reaches levels of intensity hitherto unmatched in this extremely heavy metal trio's 20-year career.

Spewn From The Earth bursts out of the speakers like Discharge and Darkthrone starting a pub fight, the title track is a hammer-down bull-charge inspired by Matt's dreams of Lemmy ("He gave me a bunch of shit, basically, and was hazing me," the frontman entertainingly relates in the press release), while *Freebooter* – inspired by another English hero, Sir Francis Drake – is pure fire-spitting thrash metal through a sludge prism, with its relentless battery and devilish swashbuckling solos.

Sumerian-themed 'rock opera' *Steps Of The Ziggurat/House Of Enlil* has a lumbering mid-tempo, but Des Kensel's hyperactive drumming has that bone-crushing, primeval cannibal ritual quality, ensuring that the nine-minute epic maintains a high nervous energy throughout. This is equally true of other songs where the chords are well spaced, like *The Pallid Mask* and *The Witch And The Christ*, that never get a chance to stretch and plod thanks to Des's ants-in-his-pants impulse for kit demolition. Of course, it could be argued that it's all a bit one-note, but as that one note is the note that makes people shit themselves, it doesn't really stand up as a valid criticism.

8

FOR FANS OF: Motörhead, Kylesa, Entombed

CHRIS CHANTLER

Voivod are taking us even further down the rabbit hole

VOIVOD
The Wake
CENTURY MEDIA

Canada's prog metal kings take a tumultuous trip

AGAINST THE ODDS, Voivod's 13th studio album turned out to be a lucky one. The death of talismanic guitarist Piggy in 2005 may not have ended the Canadians' story, but it certainly made moving forward a daunting proposition. But such was the flair and verve that new guitarist Dan 'Chewy' Mongrain brought to 2013's *Target Earth*, it felt more like an exercise in artful continuity than a break from the past. But if the first Piggy-less Voivod record steadied the ship and kept the fans happy, their 14th full-length, *The Wake*, is where this most instinctively subversive of bands veer off on another of those wonderfully wilful tangents that brought us the seminal likes of *Nothingface* and *The Outer Limits*. Fifty-six minutes of the wildest and densest music they've made in a long time, it's unmistakably Voivod, but somehow bigger, more colourful and more avowedly psychedelic than ever before.

Opening track *Obsolete Beings* is partly a red herring, its central riff letting you know precisely whose world we've been transported to, but by the time *The End Of Dormancy* slithers into view, the sonic psilocybin has kicked in and the landscape suddenly looks a lot less reassuring. The level of invention here is absurd; with Snake's voice providing the narrative glue, Voivod sound drunk on ideas, these songs' generous proportions allowing each bizarre detour to reach its most satisfying, (un)natural conclusion. There are plenty of *Dimension Hatröss*-era thrills for the faithful, of course; *Orb Confusion* is like all of the band's revelatory, late-80s moments crammed into six breathless and joyously wonky minutes, while *Always Moving* is part pop-eyed thrash, part Syd Barrett reverie. But at its heart, amid the kaleidoscopic, skew-riff meltdown of *Spherical Perspective*, the collapsing grooves of *Event Horizon* and the bewildering, cinematic frenzy of closing colossus *Sonic Mycelium, The Wake* is like nothing else on Earth and Voivod are still in a class of one.

9

FOR FANS OF: Enslaved, Vektor, Vulture Industries

DOM LAWSON

STILLBIRTH
Annihilation Of Mankind
UNIQUE LEADER

Slamming death-grind brutality from the wilds of Hagen, Germany

No, this record's title isn't about Donald Trump's plans for his time in Office, but merely the musings of a band who have honed their brutal craft over a 20-year career writing music that Ace Ventura would love. From the first track, *Fictional Entertainment*, with its industrial beats and short attention span to *Hypnotized By Lies*' soundbite of "I got bad news and I got bad news!" through to its last seconds, *Annihilation Of Mankind* is the type of record you listen to in a darkened padded room when you feel the world is slowly closing in on you. Blastbeats permeate the songs showcasing the talent of drummer Martin Grupe and the iron lungs of vocalist Lukas Swiaczny mixed with pinched harmonics are reminiscent of Slipknot's self-titled album. This isn't an easy listen, and it shouldn't be – this is a dark record with trademark sledgehammer riffs, piq squeals aplenty and technical groove in spades.

7

FOR FANS OF: Cannibal Corpse, Deicide, Crepitation

CRAIG HUNTLEY

STONE SOUR
Hydrograd: Deluxe Edition
ROADRUNNER

Corey Taylor's melodic rock crew get an extras-filled reissue

This is another chance to celebrate last year's album from Stone Sour. What stands out from the original album is the thunderous groove snaking through every song, plus the intense melodies allowed to burrow right through. This makes songs like *Tapei Person/Allah Tea, Song #3* and *Fabuless* among the best Stone Sour have ever recorded. The deluxe edition boasts a whopping 13 extra tracks, and they add a new dimension to what the band have to offer, rather than being mere fillers. Acoustic versions of *Song #3* and *Mercy* show emotive depth, while there are also powerful live performances, including a storming rendition of Soundgarden's 1991 classic, *Outshined*. This is all rounded off with caustic studio covers of Rage Against The Machine's *Bombtrack* (first released on our 2017 *Hammer Goes 90s* compilation) and Van Halen's *Unchained*. A deluxe release, with the emphasis most certainly on 'deluxe'.

8

FOR FANS OF: Anthrax, Shinedown, Soundgarden

MALCOLM DOME

TEKSTI-TV 666
Aidattu Tulevaisuus
SVART

Kvelertak tourmates keep the Finnish alt-rock flag flying

If you caught the first three Teksti-TV 666 EPs or the *1, 2, 3* release that compiled them, then chances are you won't be disappointed with *Aidattu Tulevaisuus*, since it continues the band's quest to crossbreed mesmeric krautrock with sugary alt-pop. It's a sly mix, really, because while it's easy to gobble down it's far trickier to digest, touching base with the effortless hooks of the Buzzcocks and the arch smarts of post-Pink Flag *Wire* alongside tailspinning 80s Sonic Youth wig-outs and the endless propulsive energy of Neu! Each of the songs provides an immediate rush, but it's the careful, multifaceted layering that prevents them being throwaway. This canny mix means they could be an excellent addition to a never-ending Circle gig, but the fact that they toured with shot-in-the-arm maniacs like Kvelertak also makes perfect sense as well.

7

FOR FANS OF: Circle, Gnod, The Brian Jonestown Massacre

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MORBID SKULL

Medellin's perfectly named Destroyer Attack play a savage blackened death metal that perfectly conjures imagery of Satanic thrash maniacs fighting in a Colombian cocaine war. Bestial in the time-honoured South American tradition of forefathers Sarcófago. **[8]**

LIAM YATES

DISTORTED HARMONY
A Way Out
SELF-RELEASED

These Israeli prog metallers are certainly competent, and their third album offers a lot of quality musicianship within expansive compositions, but they lack individuality. They should embrace more from their own culture. **[6]**

MALCOLM DOME

WORST
Deserto
BDFH

Seemingly taking influence from a back catalogue of Machine Head records, Brazilian hardcore quartet Worst's fourth chug-fest *Deserto* provides momentary satisfaction for the "heavy metal itch", but lacks a variety in design to enjoy longevity. **[5]**

LUKE MILNE

THERAPY?
Cleave
MARSHALL

Irish icons wring a diamond from our current grim reality

Informed by political and personal divisions, the spectre of Brexit and the evergreen appeal of downtuned, neck-bothering riffs, the impossible-to-pigeonhole Northern Irish icons' 15th opus is a rallying cry for this draconian age. Re-teaming with *Troublegum* producer Chris Sheldon, the 10-track effort is both lean and meaty at the same time and laden with arresting rhythms, cathartic lyrics and skull-cracking guitars. Fans who enjoyed the feral, rampant riffola of 2004's *Never Apologise Never Explain* will especially enjoy *Cleave*, and the likes of the bullish *Wreck It Like Beckett* and the combative *Dumbdown* already sound like pit anthems. Elsewhere, the Ulster punk-flavoured *Callow* and the anthemic *Crutch* illustrate their skill at crafting mainstream-bothering choruses, while *Success? Success Is Survival* is the album's finest track and splices together the best bits of the band's near-30-year history.

8

FOR FANS OF: Helmet, Unsane, Husker Dü

EDWIN McFEE

THE VINTAGE CARAVAN
Gateways
NUCLEAR BLAST

Iceland's classic rock trio deliver a cool blast from the past

From broad, atmospheric meanderings within *All This Time* to comparatively tight corners of *The Way*, The Vintage Caravan's fourth studio album presents a varied romp through a colourful classic rock landscape. Dusty guitars, bright vocal melodies and nods toward progressive experimentation provide the backbone to the Icelandic trio's efforts, but carefully considered emotive contouring serves as their most appetising feature. Led by the soulful grace of vocalist and guitarist Óskar Logi Ágústsson, The Vintage Caravan dovetail effortlessly from charged riffing into thought-provoking passages of melodic exploration – an intricate classic rock ballet that unfolds across 10 tracks. Despite the balance falling slightly in favour of the first half, The Vintage Caravan's smorgasbord of melody and rhythm screams to be enjoyed on vinyl, where the warm tonality of the instrumentation can reach full bloom.

7

FOR FANS OF: Blues Pills, Spiritual Beggars, Gentlemans Pistols

LUKE MILNE

VITJA
Mistaken
CENTURY MEDIA

Germany's metalcore upstarts cast their sonic net wide

The third full-length from this German melodic metalcore foursome has much in common with their previous release, *Digital Love*. Just as passionate but a touch more straightforward in structure, it's heavily produced with scatterings of electronic samples and powerful yells as well as increased amounts of clean singing. Part of the band's engaging nature comes from their diverse influences. The riffs on *To The Moon* and *Overdose* would feel at home on a Deftones album, while *Sedamine* and *Black And Blue* have moments that bring to mind Palisades and Breaking Benjamin. *Friends Don't Lie* has a frustratingly unimaginative chorus but David Beule's singing has improved since *Digital Love* and *Down* is a particularly heartfelt and unique effort that becomes increasingly addictive. On the other side of the spectrum, *Anxiety* and *Filthy* are exciting reminders of Vitja's heavier capabilities and should go down a treat live.

7

FOR FANS OF: Amity Affliction, Palisades, Novelists

NIK YOUNG

WALKING DEAD ON BROADWAY
Dead Era
LONG BRANCH

Dystopian deathcore five-piece stick to the centre lane

It really been a long time since deathcore felt like a new idea, and, although Germany's Walking Dead On Broadway have been around for about a decade, they're hardly one of the genre's originators. Three albums into their career, and, much like the genre they reside in, there is little to no development in sound or surprises to be had on *Dead Era*, but there is enough to get your head nodding and to scratch an itch for juddering, aggro-driven brutality. There is even a little five-minute breather in the quite serene, string-led instrumental of *Standstill*, which acts as a palate-cleanser before *Dead End Utopia* boots you in the teeth again. It's hard to say there is anything inherently wrong with what Walking Dead On Broadway are doing, but it's currently not enough to pull them away from the pack.

6

FOR FANS OF: Heaven Shall Burn, Fit For An Autopsy, Whitechapel

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Lawless Darkness

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Wilson: the party just got painful

WILSON
Tasty Nasty
CENTURY MEDIA

Oh Wilson, what happened to you?

WILSON'S 2013 DEBUT album, *Full Blast Fuckery*, showed such potential but now they've become a neutered, placid version of their former selves. Where before they could run with Maylene And The Sons Of Disaster or Every Time I Die, the new record sounds more like OPM. The passion for partying is still very much alive, but instead of beer-swilling basement shows now it's about radio rock and frat parties, like a sentient red cup. *Tasty Nasty* swaggers along, throwing in every synonym for getting wasted as possible, but this is not a metal record, it's barely a rock record, treading a line between a hard-rock Weezer and squelchy pop music. Opener *Dumptruck* has a fun, hip hop bounce to it, but that one idea of half-arsed rap rock is extended across nine more tracks, all under four minutes and all outstaying their welcome. *Like A Baller* sounds like Lonely Island writing a parody of *Rockstar* by Nickelback and *Act My Age* could easily be a Bowling For Soup song. There's nothing wrong with making fun music but there is no edge to this – it's a saccharine PG-rated party by a band who were much better suited to living an R-rated lifestyle. They can get heavy from time to time – the industrial-lite chorus of *Wrong Side Of History* calls to mind Marilyn Manson, while *House Of Fuckery* is annoyingly infectious and packs a hard-hitting chorus guaranteed to send fists straight through the ceiling – but it's not enough. The rest is a limp, radio-baiting exercise that feels massively compromised on all sides – from the 'wacky' lyrics to the lack of serious crunching rock'n'roll. Sure, bands evolve with the times, but the spirit is gone and the danger has been replaced by dated college humour.

4

FOR FANS OF: Weezer, Crazy Town, Kid Rock

LUKE MORTON

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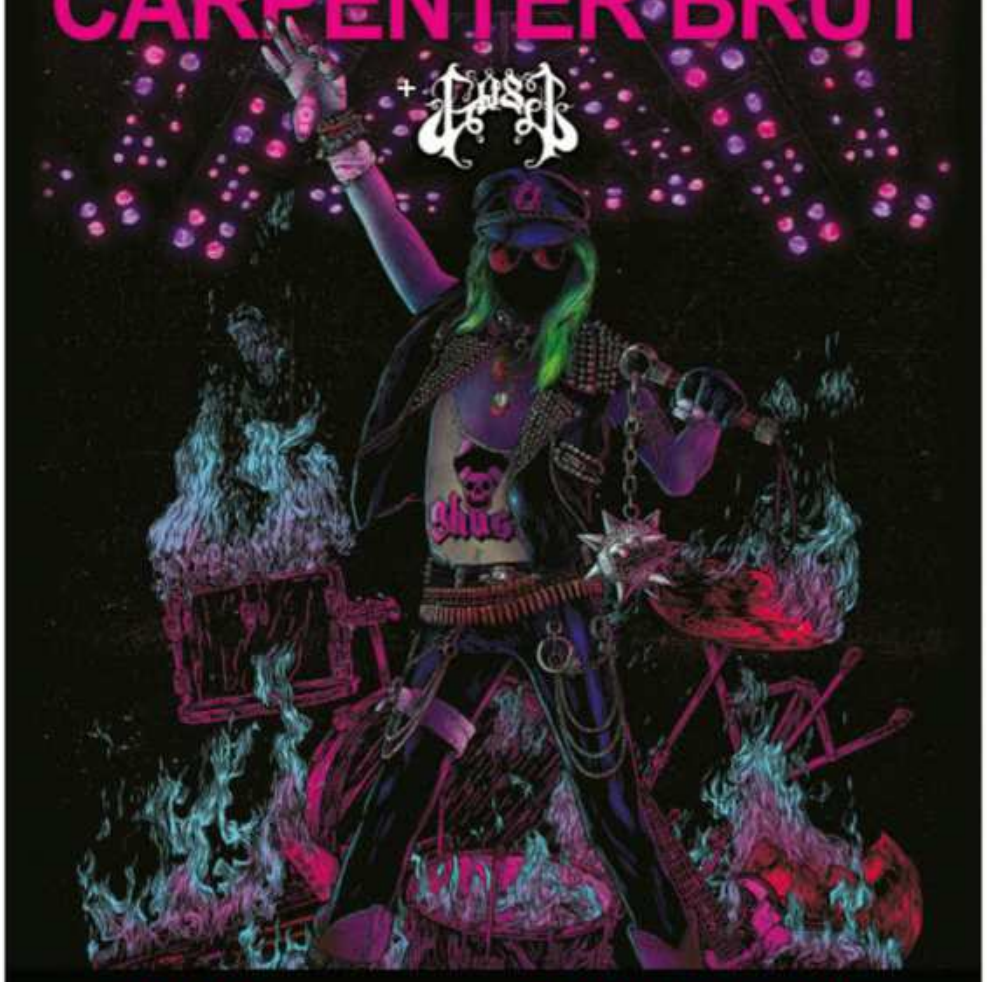
CARPENTER BRUT

+ Lust



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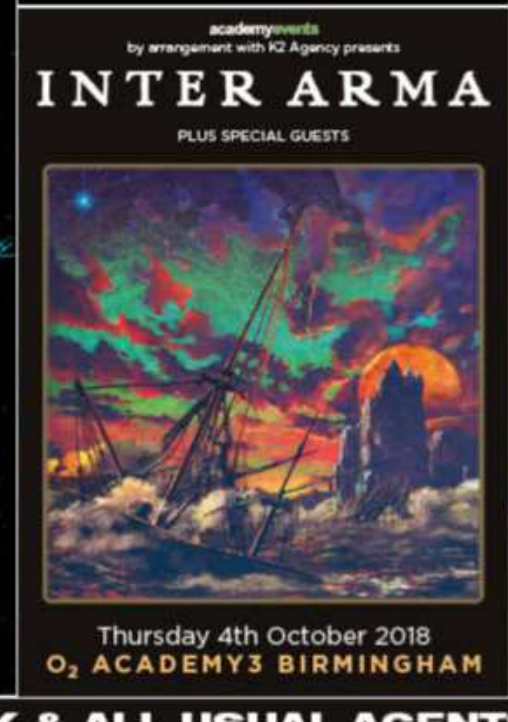

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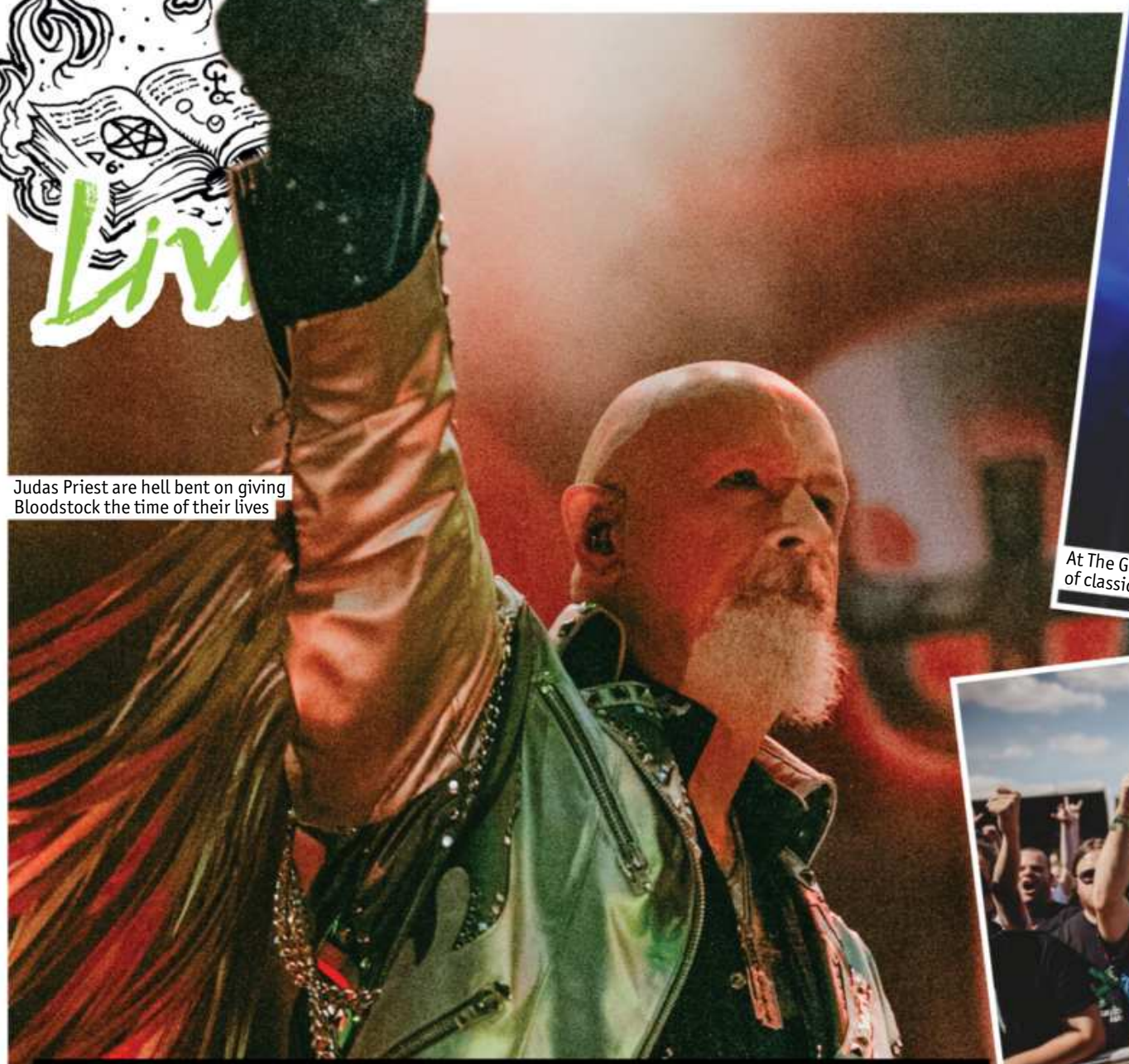

Judas Priest are hell bent on giving Bloodstock the time of their lives

At The Gates give Bloodstock a taste of classic Gothenburg death metal

Fistfuls of metal

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SETLIST

JUDAS PRIEST

Firepower
Grinder
Sinner
The Ripper
Lightning Strike
Bloodstone
Saints In Hell
Turbo Lover
Tyrant
Night Comes Down
Freewheel Burning
Rising From Ruins
You've Got Another Thing Comin'
Hell Bent For Leather
Painkiller

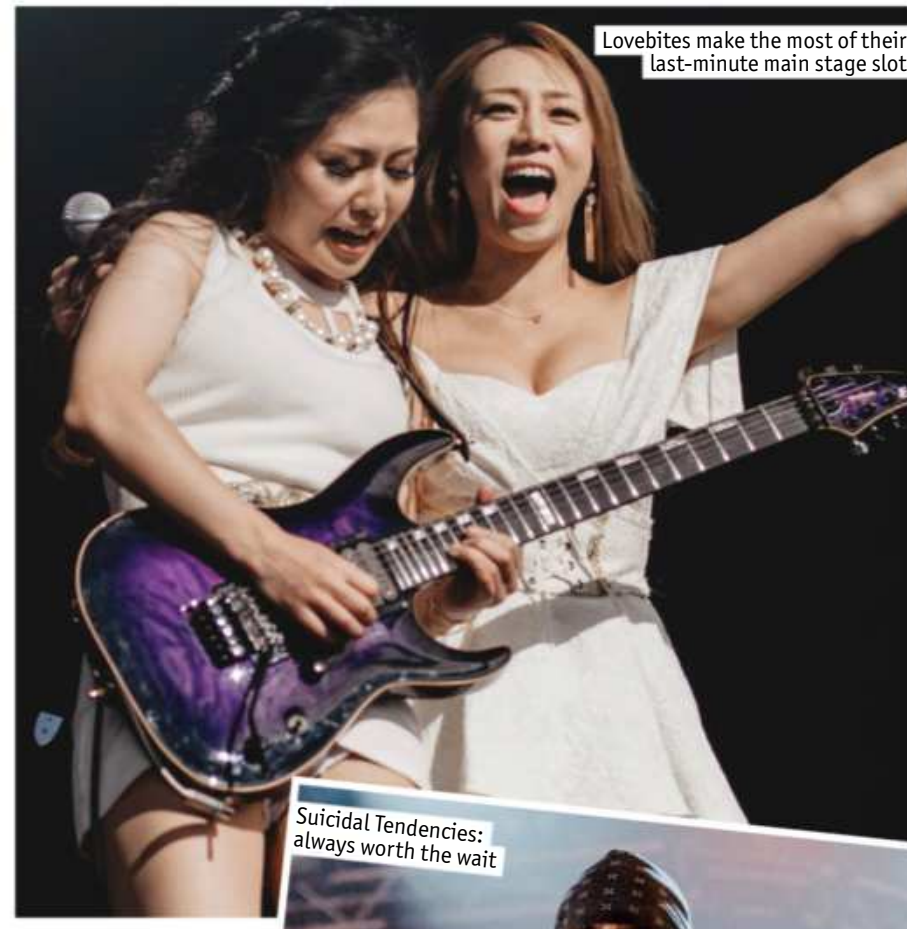
ENCORE

Metal Gods
Breaking The Law
No Surrender
Living After Midnight

Nightwish Floor the Bloodstock crowd

JAKE OWENS

Emperor: Ihsahn gives Bloodstock his nod of approval



Lovebites make the most of their last-minute main stage slot

Suicidal Tendencies: always worth the wait

Nightwish, Judas Priest and Gojira rise above the elements

FRIDAY

Ensuring that at least one festival upholds the great British tradition, the long, hot summer has snubbed Bloodstock, pelting the festival's largest crowd yet with intermittent sheets of rain instead. Spirits refused to be dampened, though, as three days of metal from deadly serious to gleefully silly are saluted.

More used to detonating in confined surroundings, **FEED THE RHINO [6]** aren't swallowed by the main stage yet their energy reserves seem to diminish quicker than usual. By comparison, thrash veterans **ONSLAUGHT [6]** are born to the big occasion, powering through tech issues and a few wobbles from their new line-up to ignite the pits with the aptly named *The Sound Of Violence*. South Africa's **DEITY'S MUSE [7]** can't conceal their sheer delight at playing the Sophie Lancaster stage, with the exhilaration seeping into the expansive Tool-isms of their material. Everything from their perverse concoction of styles to their larger-than-life presence marks **MORTISHEAD [8]** out for something special. The weather ensures **FAHRAN [4]** have a packed tent to impress, but their cliché-ridden hard rock is so sterile the onlookers don't stick around.

GODTHRYMM [6] have some established quality within their ranks, but the trio's plodding doom does very little to set pulses racing. They're more enjoyable than **SODOMIZED CADAVER [5]**, though, who lark about talking about some pretty gross activities that gets eyes rolling, before dishing out some fairly rudimentary grinding death metal. **REPRISAL [6]** do fare a bit better, but there is more enthusiasm on show here than there is craft in their meaty thrash. **DE PROFUNDIS [6]** have craft, but they're yet to graft their proggier tendencies onto their death metal base, with songs often lacking a clear direction… not that it bothers the enthusiastic fans down the front.

MEMORIAM's **[6]** death metal juggernaut merely rumbles rather than rampages along on the main stage, but it's hard to deny either the veterans' conviction or their light-hearted tribute to the lateBarry Chuckle. The Alice-Cooper-on-a-budget stage show ensures **WEDNESDAY 13 [7]** is a visual treat, while the more metallic tunes off recent effort *Condolences* deliver an aural one, too. The deadpan delivery of Nick Holmes cuts through the grisly Stockholm death metal of **BLOODBATH [8]**, with *Let The Stillborn Come To Me* a particularly ghastly highlight. Because Suicidal Tendencies are running late, **LOVEBITES [7]** take their place on the main stage. Dressedall in white and commanding the larger space with ease, the all-female Japanese five-piece's power metal mixed with Maiden-worship isn't quite there yet, but their technical skill is stellar and they prove to be more than a gimmick band.

Proving further that rousing choruses and battling power metal keyboards are Bloodstock's bread and butter, **KAMELOT [7]** feed off the passionate adulation of the hordes. Taking to the Sophie stage before Suicidal's swapped spot, you could argue that people are only claiming their spots during **INGESTED [7]**, but the fervent circlepits in response to their death grooves suggest otherwise. The stage-switch only intensifies the raucous energy that accompanies every **SUICIDAL TENDENCIES [8]** show. Yes, it's great to hear Dave Lombardo hammering away on the kit, but it's impossible to ignore Mike Muir's feverish passion and positivity. **BLEED FROM WITHIN**'s **[7]** rousing noise is led by a powerhouse in vocalist Scott Kennedy, whose energetic headbanging gets the circlepits spinning once more.

A run-through of *Anthems To The Welkin At Dusk* means there are few surprises, yet **EMPEROR [9]** are exquisite on the main stage, once again justifying the frothing devotion that has been heaped upon their creations. It's been a long time coming, but Bloodstock finally gets a headline set from **JUDAS PRIEST [8]** and it feels like everyone involved has got the timing just about right for it. Priest are here on the back of a genuinely brilliant album, songs from *Firepower* sounding right at home among some of metal's most deservedly revered material. Bringing Glen Tipton out for the home straight of classics is a masterstroke, too, with hardly a dry eye in the house. The ebullience and enthusiasm from **DORO [8]** is simply irresistible. She loves being onstage, and that comes across in a glorious Sophie-headlining performance that spans her career. Definitely one of the weekend's winners.

NIGHTWISH'S HEADLINE SLOT IS A PERFECT BLOODSTOCK FIT

SATURDAY

Oddly, the gloomy melodic death metal of **NAILED TO OBSCURITY [6]** complements the mid-morning sun outside the Sophie stage,

Gojira: flaming awesome

SETLIST

GOJIRA

Only Pain
The Heaviest Matter Of The Universe
Love
Stranded
Flying Whales
The Cell
Backbone
Terra Inc.
Silvera
L'Enfant Sauvage
The Shooting Star
Toxic Garbage Island
The Gift Of Guilt

ENCORE

Vacuity

Corpsegrinder demonstrates how he got that impressive neck

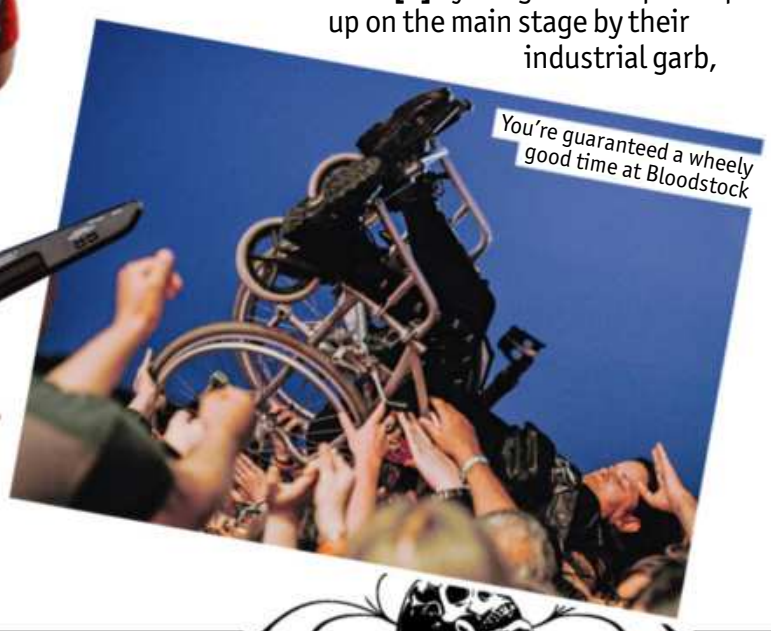
with the gorgeous twin leads lingering on the breeze. The rabid response to the caustic thrash anthems *Executioner's Tax* and *Crucifixation* help **POWER TRIP [8]** tick all the boxes for a swift trajectory up every festival line-up from here on in. **ORDEN OGAN [7]** battle ably through injury and a lack of a bassist for an enjoyable frolic through their folk-heavy Euro metal. The lack of any bottom-end only becomes apparent when followed by the colossal wall of sound inflicted by **SEPTICFLESH [8]**. The over-reliance on such an omnipresent backing track doesn't detract from the majesty of *Pyramid God* and *Anubis*. **VENOM INC [7]** defy expectations, not just for their polished jaunt through primitive anthems *Lady Lust* and *Black Metal*, but doing so just weeks after Mantas's heart surgery. Hero.

Over on the Sophie stage, UK bruisers **FORGOTTEN REMAINS [7]** pull a decent and receptive crowd for their Scandi-influenced thrash, mixing twin-guitar showmanship with the full-on belligerence of vocalist Sam Marshall. Stoner grooves are rare at Bloodstock, but **LIMB**'s **[7]** gruff, revved-up set ably compensates. Earnest in a Killswitch-as-motivational-coach kind of way, **WEIGHT OF THE TIDE [7]** blend big, drilling riffs with exploratory vocals. **DEAD LABEL [7]** are making more than a few new friends with their mix of juddering 90s groove and modern death metal. **CONJURER [8]** get a massive crowd, with plenty of talk about *Mire* a good six months on from its release. The hype is justified, no doubt turning a few curious Gojira fans into disciples. **VOLA [7]** are an odd fit for Bloodstock, but the small crowd find much to enjoy in their shimmering tech metal, and they're also unusually funny for a genre with such a serious reputation. **A FOREST OF STARS [8]** sets tend to unfold like self-contained, mindboggling adventures and today's Victorian black metal psychodrama enraptures all and sundry, mixing progressive warmth with the apocalyptic visions of frontman Mister Curse.

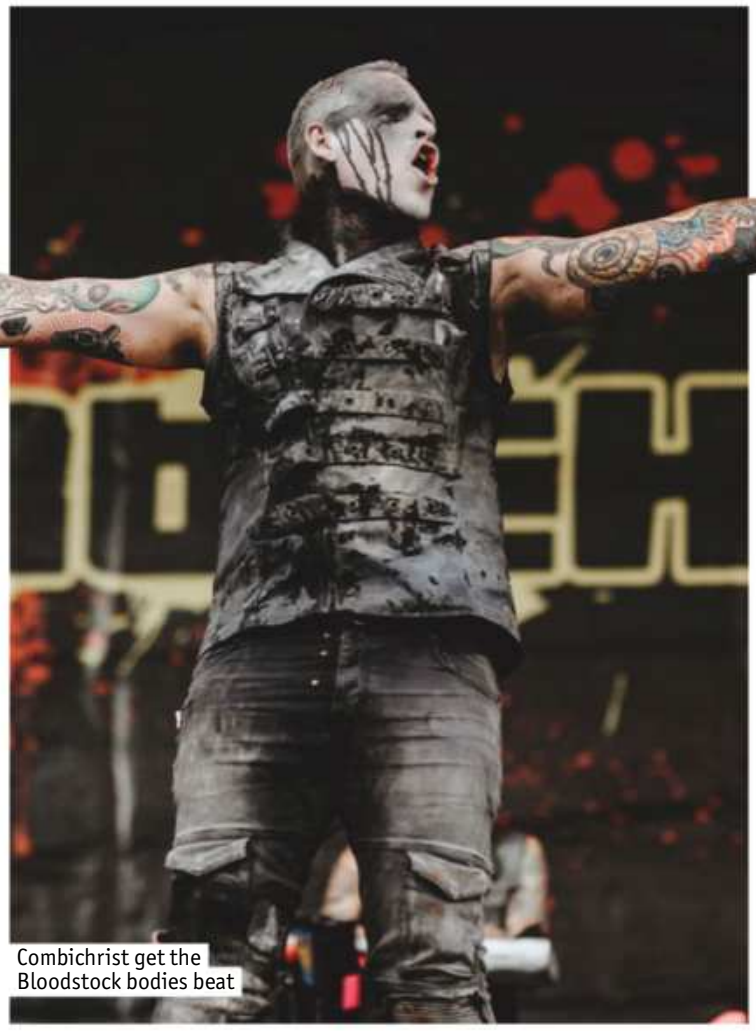
COMBICHRIST's **[8]** cyber-goth stomp is amped up on the main stage by their industrial garb, blazing energy and firebreathing ladies, and, although repetitive, their songs get everyone grooving. Who'd have thought that sweary Scottish pirate metal about boozing would pull in one of the biggest crowds, headliners included?! Looks like **ALESTORM [8]** know exactly what floats Bloodstock's boat, as various inflatables bounce over an audience who joyously shout, dance and, er, row along to jaunty jams and ridiculous yet hilarious between-song quips. It starts pissing it down when **CANNIBAL CORPSE [8]** arrive onstage, but the Floridan death metal legends carry on spewing out their grotesque compositions. There is really no such thing as a bad CC show, and the soggy hordes bow to their sheer brutality.

There really should be more people watching a band as confident as **VOYAGER [8]** on the Sophie stage. The Australian tech metallers are a taut, toned live act, and here they show off the years of road work they've put in in their homeland. It's taken more than three decades, but finally **EXHORDER [7]** play live in the UK, and they don't disappoint. Their groove thrash cuts through, with *Desecrator* and *Slaughter In*

Alestorm have the crowd hooked



You're guaranteed a wheely good time at Bloodstock


Combichrist get the Bloodstock bodies beat

Watain close the festival on a Promethean high

Jamey Jasta and Howard Jones deliver the PMA

The Vatican getting a huge reaction. The New Orleans band have purpose, energy and charisma.

It takes just seconds of **GOJIRA**'s **[10]** opener *Only Pain* to realise you are in the presence of greatness. The stage show, consummate delivery and crushing impact of *The Gift Of Guilt* and *Silvera* confirms their status as the planet's best band. **ORPHANED LAND [7]** fare well on the Sophie stage, but lack something as a stage headliner. The problem isn't their folk-tinged death metal tunes, or the spirit and passion from frontman Kobi Farhi, but it feels more workmanlike than genuinely momentous.

SUNDAY

Is it ever too early for pyro? Maiden enthusiasts **MONUMENT [6]** certainly don't think so, as their early morning main stage slot is amped up with bursts of flames, and they manage to draw in an impressive crowd despite the rain. **EVERGREY**'s **[7]** debut album turns 20 this year, and their grandiose progressive metal proves to still be going strong as they pull in a sizeable audience. Setting the tone for tonight's headliners, Swedish power metallers **AMARANTHE [6]** ham things up to the max with their three vocalists all commanding the stage with flair and drama. Chris Jericho's macho melodic metal is more show over substance, but when he announces that the UK is like a "second home" to **FOZZY [6]**, plenty are here to show their appreciation.

Those suffering from the post-Gojira blues could do a lot worse than enjoy the soulful melodies and dirty riffs of **DOOMSDAY OUTLAW [7]**, who bring a much-needed swagger to proceedings. There's nothing new to the galloping riffs and rugged delivery of **UNCURED [7]**, but the quartet's enviable energy and enthusiasm make a case to be heard. **KING LEVIATHAN [6]** are a game of two halves, sounding monstrous when their technical extremity hits, but folding when the melodic choruses fail to spark. The crowd for Kiwi trio **ALIEN WEAPONRY [7]** is quite something for the debut UK show from a band with members so young they can only play as the festival takes place in the school holidays. A packed tent finds a shed-load of potential here, and five years from now they could be world class. **SANGRE [6]** have a touch of Brujeria about them. The bounce and aggression are present but sadly memorable songs are lacking. Ditto for **UNDERSIDE [6]**. The Nepalese quintet are as tight as any band here, but the most memorable thing about them are the dancers in carnival garb.

JASTA & FRIENDS [8] resembles an action movie ensemble: a bit of mess, some hammy moments, but ultimately a ridiculously enjoyable triumph as metal greats unite for a thunderous finale of *Bury Me In Smoke*. By comparison, **MR BIG [5]** are incomparably more accomplished, but while it's fun seeing Billy Sheehan and Paul Gilbert's wizardry and singing along to *To Be With You*, there's a lack of substance. You could set your watch to **DEVILDRIVER [6]** with scorching riffs, mammoth pits and Dez's affable charm the order of the day, even 15 years on.

All that's stopping UK/Indian death metallers **DEMONIC RESURRECTION [8]** from becoming huge is geographical distance. Technically dazzling and expansive, and fronted by the hilariously charming Sahil Makhija, they hold a packed Sophie crowd in their effortless thrall. Two-piece **MANTAR [8]** don't get the audience their pummelling grooves and overdriven riffs deserve, but anyone within earshot gets their nervous system hijacked, as if by someone manically pushing random buttons on the controls. They may have an ex-Megadeth member in their ranks, but **ACT OF DEFIANCE [5]** really don't have much more than pure technicality or well-worn metal clichés. **PALLBEARER [9]**, however, are exceptional today, a swirling vortex of huge riffs and sombre melodies, they're also heavier in the live environment than they are on record and they come close to stealing the weekend.

The reaction to tracks from *Slaughter Of The Soul* on the main stage doesn't diminish the impact of **AT THE GATES' [8]** superb recent material, with tracks like *A Stare Bound In Stone* and *The Night Eternal* fitting in as seamlessly as new lead guitarist Jonas Stålhammar. **NIGHTWISH**'s **[8]** headline slot is a perfect Bloodstock fit, a blend of unashamed and imperious cheese, a retina-raiding stageshow and a *Decades*-derived journey through the band's history given yet more coherence by Floor Jansen's immaculate vocals. Sometimes it's *too much*, but tonight they're a binge of the senses. **WATAIN [9]** close the festival with possibly the greatest set the Sophie stage has ever seen. Erik Danielsson sets fire to everything before leading his charges through a hate-filled set of remorseless black metal. A vile and malevolent way to end a wonderful weekend.

MALCOLM DOME/STEPHEN HILL/HANNAH MAY KILROY/ ADAM REES/JONATHAN SELZER

TONIGHT CONFIRMS GOJIRA'S STATUS AS THE PLANET'S BEST BAND

LIVES

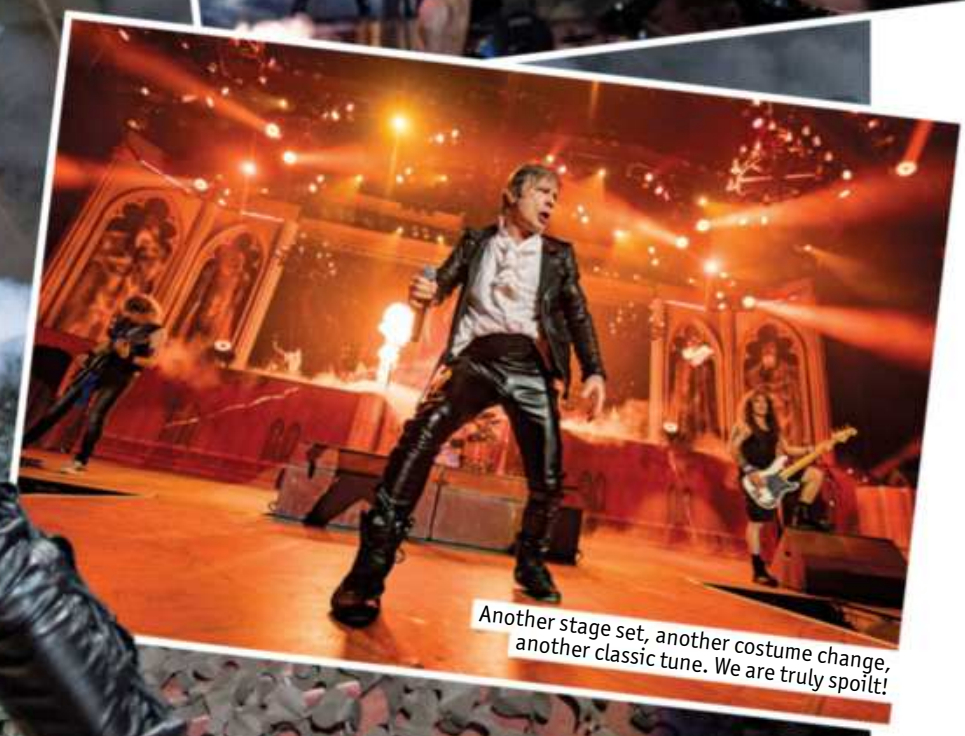
IRON MAIDEN

KILLSWITCH ENGAGE

02 ARENA, LONDON

Steve, Dave, Adrian and Janick fire on all cylinders

Steve strikes a rather familiar pose for the Maiden faithful



Another stage set, another costume change, another classic tune. We are truly spoilt!

Let's face it, it was only a matter of time before Bruce got a plane onstage

JOHN MCMURTRIE

SETLIST

Aces High
Where Eagles Dare
2 Minutes To Midnight
The Clansman
The Trooper
Revelations
For The Greater Good Of God
The Wicker Man
Sign Of The Cross
Flight Of Icarus
Fear Of The Dark
The Number Of The Beast
Iron Maiden

ENCORE

The Evil That Men Do
Hallowed Be Thy Name
Run To The Hills
Always Look On The Bright Side Of Life (outro tape)

You've gotta love Bruce –he's a real Trooper

The devotees gathering at the altar of Maiden

Jesse and Howard give KSE fans a double treat

Britain's metal titans unleash an assault on the senses

THERE ARE 20,000 people here tonight, and at least two-thirds are wearing a t-shirt with the headliners' name on it. Everywhere you look, one of a thousand variants of Eddie The 'Ed's face glares back at you: Demon Eddie, Trooper Eddie, Straightjacket Eddie, Bounty Hunter Eddie… you know the names and the pack drills. Brand loyalty is par for the course with most metal bands, but this is something else. It goes beyond regulation-issue fandom into the realms of absolute devotion. The whole thing feels like an army gathering for battle, or a rogue state that's suddenly sprung to life on the Greenwich peninsula: the Maiden Nation.

This is the last night of the Legacy Of The Beast tour, a 35-date extravaganza designed to flog the mobile phone game of the same name. Except that cheap shot doesn't quite do it justice. Everyone who has seen any of the preceding 34 gigs has unanimously hailed them as the finest shows not just of Maiden's career, but of any metal band, anywhere and any time. Spoilers have been almost impossible to avoid, ramping up the anticipation to feverish levels. But surely it can't be as good as people are saying? Can it?

KILLSWITCH ENGAGE [8] have the not-so-difficult task of warming up a crowd who are doing a pretty good job of warming themselves up without any help. That a heavyweight act 20 years into their own successful career have opted to take second billing shows the esteem in which they hold the headliners.

But then Maiden's genes can be detected in the DNA of every metalcore band with a twin-guitar set-up, and Killswitch are no exception. Scratch away the surface aggro of *Hate By Design* and *Lifeless*, and you'll find the same bolshy, jousting melodies that Maiden built their success on. It doesn't hurt that singer Jesse Leach is one of metalcore's great frontmen. His black-hole intensity has its own gravitational pull, one that's at odds with many of his contemporaries' angry-dudes-on-'roids approach. It's certainly a world away from that of his livewire successor-turned-predecessor, Howard Jones, who rocks up to duet on *The End Of Heartache*. The surprise is lessened by the fact that the same thing happened during last night's show at this same venue, but it doesn't dilute the wave of excitement that rolls through the crowd in front of the stage. Still, this is one band's night, and no one's going to upstage them.

There's a tang of expectation in the air in the 45 minutes between Killswitch leaving the stage and **IRON MAIDEN [10]** taking it. All but the most Luddite and/or obstinate fan can have failed to catch wind of what's in store: the props, the pyro, the relentless energy of a band well into their fifth decade. But nothing can really prepare you for how good it really is.

First things first: that advance word isn't wrong. You won't see a better live show this decade. In fact, you'll be hard pressed to see one in any decade, past or future. The Legacy Of The Beast tour is Iron Maiden in excelsis – a full-blown audio-visual sensequake like they don't make anymore.

Or, more accurately, like they never did. Not even Maiden themselves have ever attempted anything this big. From the 90%-scale Spitfire that dangles over the band's head like the world's biggest Airfix model during opener *Aces High* to the giant Demon Eddie head that appears during the set's closing stages, this has the whiff of big ideas, matching budgets and, in the case of Bruce Dickinson's multitude of costume changes – Flying ace! Swashbuckling swordsman! Sinister cardinal! – a wardrobe to rival Beyoncé's.

Musically, Maiden have swerved the 'greatest hits' route they usually take on these between-album tours. Or at least they've mixed things up. The setlist is carved into three broad thematic acts: War (*Aces High* through to *The Trooper*), Religion (an electrifying *Revelations* through to *Sign Of The Cross*) and Hell (everything from *Number Of The Beast* to *Hallowed Be Thy Name*), each with its own appropriate backdrop, from camo nets to cathedral-style architecture to that animatronic demon head that looms over the back of the stage.

If there are a few surprises in the setlist, then Bruce is – pardon the pun – a revelation. A cancer survivor who celebrated his 60th birthday just a few days ago – "I'm the baby of the band," he quips – he's a blur of movement, leaping from the monitors, battling Eddie with a claymore during *The Clansman*, almost crème brûléeing the top of Nicko McBrain's head with a pair of flamethrowers during *Flight Of Icarus*. He's never been short of energy, but that brush with death seems to have understandably imbued him with a titanic lust for life.

They encore with the glorious one-two-three-four of *The Evil That Men Do, Hallowed Be Thy Name, Run To The Hills* and *Monty Python*'s *Always Look On The Bright Side Of Life* – surely an honorary Maiden song by now. They take a well-deserved bow, and the Maiden Nation begins to disperse, safe in the knowledge they've watched the greatest show on earth. Just one lingering question remains: how the hell do they top that?

DAVE EVERLEY

NOT EVEN MAIDEN THEMSELVES HAVE EVER ATTEMPTED ANYTHING THIS BIG

Zeal & Ardor: loud and proud

Conjurer and Pijn embark on a joint adventure

Myrkur: enchanting

ARCTANGENT 2018

FERNHILL FARM, COMPTON MARTIN

Alcest and Zeal & Ardor head up three days of expansive exhilaration

SITUATED IN THE middle of nowhere, away from any notion of 4G signal, sits ArcTanGent: a haven of progressive music across the spectrum of all things heavy. Starting proceedings on the Yohkai stage are **OHHMS [6]**, doing their best with a muddy sound to unleash the power of sludge-laden riffs. **SVALBARD [7]** in the smaller PX3 tent drag in a huge crowd for their powerful, blackened hardcore, unleashing a barrage of potent new material. **PIJN & CONJURER**'s **[8]** specially commissioned Curse These Metal Hands project is a headbanging odyssey in the vein of Baroness, barely allowing the crowd any breathing room. ArcTanGent faves **ROLO TOMASSI [9]** deliver a day-winning performance with their beautifully brutal set comprised of entirely new material. Holy Roar have a huge presence at ATG and their flagship band are taking no prisoners. **BOSSK [8]** round off the first day with an aural journey through time and space, doused in gallons of groove. The Bixler stage bursts with bodies for **CONJURER [8]** on day two, unleashing a monumentally heavy set that opens up pits and sends crowdsurfers flying around the marquee. Post-metal stalwarts **PELICAN [7]** provide the ideal soundtrack to the gloomy skies with their hypnotic, skyscraper-sized instrumentals. **ZEAL & ARDOR [9]** win the Band Of The Weekend award with their captivating performance in the Yohkai tent. Biblically loud, the intensity of *Row Row* and an exorcising *Devil Is Fine* makes this unique group of artists stand out in an ocean of progressive music. That said, ATG might not be the place for full-blown prog as **ANATHEMA [6]** fail to pull a substantial crowd to the main stage, but their polished sound wins over those who made it. **LEPROUS [7]** finish day two with a mesmerising light show and a set that diverts from technical wizardry to devastating heaviness in the blink of an eye. **MØL [9]** kick off the final day with their post-black metal onslaught and hyper-animated vocalist Kim Song Sternkopf proving he's one of the best frontmen in metal right now, adding to the sheer intensity of the music. **BLACK PEAKS [8]** play to a packed crowd with vocalist Will Gardner seemingly downing all the Panda Pops beforehand, throwing himself around the stage as the band blast a thousand ears to pieces. **MYRKUR [9]** opts for a more choral than black metal set, leaning on her latest album *Mareridt* and delivering an enchanting performance that builds to a stunning crescendo. **ALCEST [8]** are the perfect finale to a drizzly day, building a vast wall of noise with their enrapturing brand of shoegaze. Arms reach to the heavens, couples embrace and a smirk is plastered across frontman Neige's face, knowing they have created something truly memorable at a festival of one-off bands.

LUKE MORTON

DJE IMAGES

SETLIST

ZEAL & ARDOR

In Ashes
Servants
Come On Down
Blood In The River
Row Row
Fire Of Motion
You Ain't Coming Back
Waste
We Can't Be Found
Devil Is Fine
Don't You Dare
Baphomet

DANZIG
PARADISE LOST
BRIXTON ACADEMY, LONDON

PARADISE LOST's **[8]** opening set is goth made for stadiums. "We're from the North," says Nick Holmes with all the stoicism of the Night's Watch. *The Enemy and Faith Divides Us – Death Unites Us* are crushing laments, but their rarely performed cover of Bronski Beat's *Smalltown Boy* is the real gem. From the first notes of *Skincarver* Brixton explodes to the return of **DANZIG [9]**, unravelling into a sweaty mass of air punches and airborne lager. At 63 years of age Glenn Danzig is a physical and vocal powerhouse, and with a setlist that spans three decades they don't scrimp on the hits, from the old-school chug of *Am I Demon*, an electrifying and rousing *Tired Of Being Alive* to the stirring doomy churn of *Left Hand Black*. *Mother* is the obvious crowd fave but ending on *Long Way Back From Hell* is a killer move. "I've seen a lot of pussy-ass bands come and go but we're still fucking here!" booms Glenn at one point tonight. Long may they continue.

HOLLY WRIGHT

MYLES KENNEDY
THE LONDON PALLADIUM

The Palladium is a beautiful, historic venue, but as a fully seated theatre, it's an odd choice for a rock gig. Myles Kennedy clearly feels the same. Faced with the prospect of playing to a room relaxing in gilded, velvet-backed chairs, he encourages anyone who feels like it to "get up and boogie" and it takes all of three songs for the whole room to get up on its feet. The Alter Bridge frontman was in London recently, performing a mostly acoustic showcase of his solo debut, *Year Of The Tiger*. This time, he's back with the rest of his band, allowing him to put some real throttle behind *Devil On The Wall* and play with the structures of *Turning Stones* and a countrified rendition of Maiden's *The Trooper*. What's really striking, though, is the level of intimacy Myles manages to conjure in this far-from-cosy setting. Giggling, chatting and sharing personal memories with an enthralled crowd, this feels more like watching him jam in your living room. A truly special night spent with one of metal's classiest frontmen.

8

DANNII LEIVERS

MARIE KORNER

Carnifex become the night's sore thumb

Dying Fetus: not to be fucked with

DYING FETUS
CARNIFEX/TOXIC HOLOCAUST/GOATWHORE
ISLINGTON ACADEMY, LONDON

Maryland metallers hash out their recent classics

AN OLD-SCHOOL VIBE lines the edges of **GOATWHORE**'s **[7]** opening assault, as the New Orleans quartet unleash a dense arsenal of classic thrash riffs. Passing the torch to a combination of Slayer-inspired rhythmic fury framed with punky melodic riffing, **TOXIC HOLOCAUST [8]** prove worthy successors with the likes of crowd-pleaser *Nuke The Cross*. As the Oregon hellraisers whip the venue into a merry-go-round of headbanging, exhilarated cheers and a swarm of devil horns, a blissfully nostalgic haze of thrash-infused carnage lingers. As such, it's strange to see modern deathcore combatants **CARNIFEX [6]** called to the stand. Ordinarily, the Californian quintet's aggression would be well-received, yet here it feels abrasive and misplaced. Despite a well-executed performance, you can't help but wonder if frontman Scott Lewis's remark on the variety of each performing act is at least marginally self-aware. Thankfully, **DYING FETUS [9]** plunge the crowd back into the fray, plucking furious death metal highlights from 2017's *Wrong One To Fuck With*. Unfurling an expertly polished onslaught, the Maryland trio boast a raucous celebration of rhythmic variety, twisting and convulsing wildly across *Panic Amongst The Herd* and *Seething With Disdain*. Their hulking chug-fest positively ignites the venue as the crowd dissolves into near-tribal feral aggression, and the posthumous array of ear-to-ear grins and sweat-drenched clothing speaks volumes of Dying Fetus's remarkably executed headline performance.

LUKE MILNE

Max Cavalera rallies the tribe

Marc Rizzo salutes Dime and Kerry

DEREK BERMNER

SOULFLY
ISLINGTON ACADEMY, LONDON

Max Cavalera and co get into the community spirit

IT'S MAD TO THINK about how prolific Soulfly have been over their 21-year career. They're are about to release their 11th album, *Ritual*, after which Max Cavalera will be just one album away from doubling the number of albums he made with Sepultura, making choosing a setlist an increasingly difficult proposition. Military scrim netting adorns the stage, which provides an early indication that tonight, Soulfly are at war. But this is a family affair with Max's son Zyon providing the phenomenal drumming that has become a cornerstone of all of Cavalera's various projects. Metal's power lies inherently in its rhythms and this tribal quality has kept Soulfly's material sounding relevant. Even the early nu metal cuts such as *No Hope = No Fear* and *Back To the Primitive* sound pertinent almost two decades later with such a powerhouse behind the kit. Highlights are plentiful; *Rise Of The Fallen* sounds immense, even without Greg Puciato's guest vocal and we're treated to a furious rendition of Nailbomb's *Wasting Away*, which makes the crowd go suitably ballistic. There are some minor stumbling blocks; while guitarist Marc Rizzo is clearly extraordinarily talented, his solo kills the set's momentum, despite paying crowd-pleasing tributes to Pantera and Slayer. But as Max invites a boy who's been headbanging on the front row all night up onstage during an explosive *Jumpdafuckup*, the endearing moment reminds us that it's a sense of community and family is what has made Soulfly endure for all these years.

8

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SIKTH

The UK tech metal innovators return for a run of shows

WHAT DO YOU HAVE PLANNED FOR THIS TOUR?

Mikee Goodman (vocals): "We're going to play some extra songs from the new album – it's going to be the last tour for a while so we want to make it special. It's going to be a longer-than-usual set, a lot of full-on energy in places we haven't played in a long time. Since we came back in 2014 we've done three tours in just the main places, so we wanted to freshen things up!"

YOU'VE BEEN TOURING RELENTLESSLY SINCE THE RELEASE OF *THE FUTURE IN WHOSE EYES?* WHAT DRIVES YOU TO PLOUGH THROUGH IT?

"The passion for playing live music, that's one of the biggest buzzes you can get. At live shows I've had people coming up to me with my poetry tattooed all over them, it's so great. I've seen someone with an entire sleeve of *When It Rains*!"

HOW DOES TOURING NOW COMPARE TO YOUR ORIGINAL RUN IN THE EARLY 00s?

"Well, our fanbase has gotten older, that's for sure. We're also playing bigger places now – not on this little tour we have coming up, but it grew when we came back. Now, people talk to us like we are pioneers of the scene rather than just an exciting band on their first round. A lot has changed because the industry's taken such a savage dive. Ticket prices have risen and so many things have changed in the live arena, but I guess people can afford it because they don't buy CDs as much."

HAVE YOU FOUND THAT THE EXPLOSION OF PROGRESSIVE AND TECHNICAL METAL IN RECENT YEARS HAS BENEFITED YOU GUYS?

"Catered festivals like ArcTanGent and UK Tech-Fest are awesome – you get a great buzz from them. We know that if the scene didn't grow the way it did we wouldn't have been asked back."

DO YOU TAKE ANY HOME COMFORTS WITH YOU OUT ON THE ROAD?

"I take special earphones so I can get myself to sleep! Ha ha ha! A lot of us take neck pillows, our tunes and, obviously, one of us brings an Xbox and *FIFA*."

THE AMITY AFFLICTION
DREAM STATE, THE PLOT IN YOU

OCT 2 BIRMINGHAM O2 ACADEMY 2
OCT 3 LEEDS THE CHURCH
OCT 4 LONDON ELECTRIC BALLROOM
OCT 5 GLASGOW QUEEN MARGARET UNION
OCT 7 MANCHESTER ACADEMY 2
OCT 8 BRISTOL SWX

AMORPHIS & SOILWORK
JINJER, NAILED TO OBSCURITY

FEB 4 LONDON ELECTRIC BALLROOM

BEHEMOTH

FEB 6 BRISTOL MOTION
FEB 7 BIRMINGHAM O2 INSTITUTE
FEB 8 LONDON KENTISH TOWN FORUM
FEB 9 MANCHESTER O2 RITZ
FEB 10 DUBLIN VICAR STREET
FEB 11 GLASGOW QUEEN MARGARET UNION

BLACK PEAKS

SEP 30 GLOUCESTER UNDERGROUND FESTIVAL
OCT 5 LONDON OMEARA
OCT 11 BELFAST EMPIRE MUSIC HALL
OCT 12 DUBLIN THE GRAND SOCIAL
OCT 13 NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE THE CLUNY
OCT 14 GLASGOW TUTS
OCT 16 LEEDS THE KEY CLUB
OCT 17 MANCHESTER ACADEMY 3
OCT 18 BIRMINGHAM HARE & HOUNDS
OCT 19 LONDON THE UNDERWORLD
OCT 20 SHEFFIELD THE LEADMILL
OCT 21 WORTHING FORTY TWO

THE BLACK QUEEN

OCT 5 BRISTOL THEKLA
OCT 7 GLASGOW SWG3
OCT 8 LEEDS BRUDENELL SOCIAL CLUB
OCT 9 MANCHESTER DEAF INSTITUTE
OCT 10 NOTTINGHAM CONTEMPORARY
OCT 11 LONDON BUSH HALL

BULLET FOR MY VALENTINE
OF MICE & MEN

OCT 10 LONDON ALEXANDRA PALACE
OCT 11 CARDIFF MOTORPOINT ARENA

CANE HILL

DEC 11 BRISTOL SWX
DEC 12 BIRMINGHAM O2 INSTITUTE
DEC 13 GLASGOW GARAGE
DEC 14 MANCHESTER O2 RITZ
DEC 15 LONDON O2 KENTISH TOWN FORUM

COHEED AND CAMBRIA

OCT 9 CARDIFF Y-PLAS
OCT 10 GLASGOW SWG3
OCT 12 NEWCASTLE O2 ACADEMY
OCT 13 MANCHESTER ACADEMY
OCT 14 BIRMINGHAM O2 ACADEMY
OCT 16 LONDON ROUNDHOUSE

CLUTCH

DEC 18 BRISTOL O2 ACADEMY
DEC 19 GLASGOW O2 ACADEMY
DEC 20 MANCHESTER ACADEMY
DEC 21 LONDON O2 ACADEMY BRIXTON
DEC 22 BIRMINGHAM O2 ACADEMY

HALESTORM
AVATAR

SEP 19 DUBLIN ACADEMY
SEP 20 BELFAST LIMELIGHT
SEP 22 SHEFFIELD ACADEMY
SEP 23 GLASGOW O2 ACADEMY
SEP 24 BIRMINGHAM O2 ACADEMY
SEP 26 MANCHESTER O2 APOLLO
SEP 28 LONDON O2 ACADEMY BRIXTON
SEP 29 BRISTOL O2

KING 810

NOV 29 BIRMINGHAM O2 ACADEMY 2
NOV 30 BRIGHTON CONCORDE 2
DEC 2 BOURNEMOUTH THE OLD FIRE STATION
DEC 3 PORTSMOUTH WEDGWOOD ROOMS
DEC 5 NORWICH WATERFRONT
DEC 6 TUNBRIDGE WELLS FORUM
DEC 7 NOTTINGHAM RESCUE ROOMS
DEC 8 LEICESTER DRYDEN STREET SOCIAL
DEC 9 COLCHESTER ARTS CENTRE
DEC 11 BRISTOL FLEECE
DEC 12 STOKE ON TRENT SUGARMILL
DEC 13 MANCHESTER CLUB ACADEMY
DEC 14 LEEDS KEY CLUB
DEC 16 SHEFFIELD FOUNDRY
DEC 17 HULL THE WELLY 2
DEC 18 NEWCASTLE O2 ACADEMY 2
DEC 19 OXFORD O2 ACADEMY 2
DEC 20 LONDON SCALA
DEC 21 BRIDGEND HOBOS

MELVINS
JON SPENCER (except Bristol)

SEPT 26 BRISTOL EXCHANGE (+ FUCK AUTHORITY)
OCT 23 BIRMINGHAM O2 ACADEMY 2
OCT 24 NORWICH THE WATERFRONT
OCT 25 CARDIFF Y PLAS
OCT 26 LEEDS STYLUS
OCT 28 MANCHESTER ACADEMY 2

OCT 29 BRIGHTON CONCORDE 2
OCT 30 LONDON KOKO

MYRKUR
DEC 18 LONDON THE DOME
DEC 19 BRISTOL THE FLEECE
DEC 20 NOTTINGHAM RESCUE ROOMS
DEC 21 GLASGOW THE GREAT EASTERN
DEC 22 MANCHESTER GORILLA

NIGHTWISH
BEAST IN BLACK
DEC 8 LONDON SSE WEMBLEY ARENA
DEC 10 BIRMINGHAM ARENA
DEC 11 MANCHESTER ARENA

OVERKILL
MAR 21 LONDON O2 ISLINGTON ACADEMY
MAR 23 DUBLIN O2 ACADEMY
MAR 24 GLASGOW SWG3

PARKWAY DRIVE
JAN 29 MANCHESTER O2 APOLLO
JAN 31 NOTTINGHAM MOTORPOINT ARENA
FEB 1 CARDIFF MOTORPOINT ARENA
FEB 2 LONDON ALEXANDRA PALACE

PITCHSHIFTER
EARTHTONE9
NOV 19 PORTSMOUTH WEDGEWOOD ROOMS
NOV 20 MANCHESTER ACADEMY 3

OBITUARY
The DM veterans join Slayer's stacked farewell tour

HOW DID YOU REACT WHEN YOU HEARD THAT SLAYER WERE CALLING IT QUITS?
John Tardy (vocals): "We grew up with them, so it's sad, especially knowing that we're not that much younger than those guys. But, at the same time, we're super-proud of them for doing what they did over the years and staying true."

SO IS THIS GOING TO BE A BITTERSWEET TOUR?
"Man, it's exciting! We've wanted to tour with Slayer for forever, so we're so fortunate to finally get to do it. It's gonna be awesome!"

YOU'RE STILL TOURING FOR YOUR LATEST ALBUM. HOW ARE THE LIVE CROWDS ENJOYING THE NEW STUFF?
"We'll be touring it for another 10 years! Ha ha! It's been tremendous. Everybody's really into it. We still sell a lot of copies every night at the merch booth, especially vinyl."

WITH 10 ALBUMS UNDER YOUR BELT NOW, HOW HARD WILL IT BE TO SORT THE SLAYER TOUR SETLIST?
"The band could break up trying to put the setlist together. You're gonna get six or seven songs out of us; choosing is hard enough on a regular basis when we're doing about an hour and 15 minutes!"

OBITUARY HAVE A VERY INTENSE LIVE SHOW. DO YOU HAVE TO WORK YOURSELF INTO A CERTAIN MINDSET TO PLAY SHOWS THAT BRUTAL?
"We are very much regular dudes to hang out with; we're shorts and flip-flops kinda dudes. For me, it's a total shift of gears to get into that mindset. But we love the energy! What we thrive on is our live performance and feeling that music. It comes out so much better live than it does on our records."

WHAT DO YOU HAVE PLANNED FOR AFTER THE SLAYER RUN? IS THERE ANY NEW MUSIC IN THE PIPELINE?
"As we go along, every concert that we do, we're stacking up ideas. But we are considering maybe doing a couple of songs, just because we have a couple of things we've been messing with and we have a studio here: it doesn't cost us a lot to do it. We may put together a few songs and just put them out for no reason."

NOV 21 BRISTOL SWX
NOV 22 LONDON THE GARAGE
NOV 23 LONDON THE GARAGE
NOV 24 NOTTINGHAM ROCK CITY

POWERWOLF
AMARANTHE, KISSIN' DYNAMITE
NOV 12 LONDON KOKO

ROLO TOMASSI
OCT 30 NOTTINGHAM RESCUE ROOMS
OCT 31 BOURNEMOUTH THE ANVIL
NOV 01 CARDIFF CLWB IFOR BACH
NOV 02 NORWICH WATERFRONT
NOV 09 LONDON SCALA

SAXON
WAYWARD SONS
OCT 18 GLASGOW BARROWLAND (+ Y&T, RAVEN)
OCT 19 LONDON ROUNDHOUSE (+ Y&T, RAVEN)
OCT 20 PORTSMOUTH GUILDHALL (+ Y&T, RAVEN)
OCT 21 MANCHESTER ACADEMY (+ Y&T, RAVEN)
NOV 8 BATH FORUM (+ DORO)
NOV 10 NOTTINGHAM ROYAL CONCERT HALL (+ DORO)
NOV 11 NEWCASTLE CITY HALL (+ DORO)

SEVENDUST
DEC 1 SOUTHAMPTON ENGINE ROOMS
DEC 2 LONDON ELECTRIC BRIXTON
DEC 4 MANCHESTER ACADEMY 2
DEC 5 GLASGOW GARAGE
DEC 6 NOTTINGHAM ROCK CITY
DEC 7 BRISTOL SWX

SIKTH
LOATHE
SEP 14 SHEFFIELD THE PLUG
SEP 15 LIVERPOOL HANGAR 34
SEP 16 CARDIFF GLOBE
SEP 18 PLYMOUTH THE JUNCTION
SEP 19 SOUTHAMPTON ENGINE ROOMS
SEP 20 OXFORD BULLINGDON

SLAYER
LAMB OF GOD, ANTHRAX, OBITUARY
NOV 1 DUBLIN 3 ARENA
NOV 3 LONDON WEMBLEY ARENA
NOV 5 CARDIFF MOTORPOINT ARENA
NOV 7 BIRMINGHAM ARENA
NOV 9 MANCHESTER ARENA
NOV 10 NEWCASTLE METRO RADIO ARENA
NOV 12 GLASGOW SSE HYDRO

HAMMER PRESENTS
WITHIN TEMPTATION
NOV 9 BIRMINGHAM O2 ACADEMY
NOV 10 MANCHESTER ACADEMY
NOV 11 GLASGOW O2 ACADEMY
NOV 13 LONDON O2 BRIXTON ACADEMY

ZEAL & ARDOR
NOV 30 BRISTOL THE FLEECE
DEC 1 BRIGHTON THE HAUNT
DEC 1 LONDON ELECTRIC BALLROOM
DEC 4 BIRMINGHAM O2 INSTITUTE 2
DEC 5 MANCHESTER GORILLA
DEC 6 LEEDS CHURCH
DEC 7 GLASGOW KING TUTS

SUBTERRANEA
GOING UNDERGROUND

DAMNATION FESTIVAL
NAPALM DEATH, IHSHAN, ENTOMED AD, VADER, ANAAL NATHRAKH, BATUSHKA + MORE
NOV 3 LEEDS UNIVERSITY UNION

DEMILICH
SPECTRAL VOICE, NECROT
SEP 16 LONDON BOSTON MUSIC ROOM

THE GREAT OLD ONES
AUÐN
NOV 14 LONDON BOSTON MUSIC ROOM (+ FEN)
NOV 15 MANCHESTER REBELLION (+ DAWN RAY'D)
NOV 16 GLASGOW AUDIO
NOV 17 NOTTINGHAM THE LEVEL (+ AKLASH, WOLVENCRAFT)

MYSTIFIER
SOLSTICE, CRAVEN IDOL
NOV 2 LONDON BOSTON MUSIC ROOM

NIBIRU
VAREGO, SURA
OCT 11 LONDON THE BLACK HEART

EMMA RUTH RUNDLE
JAYE JAYLE
NOV 3 MANCHESTER SOUP KITCHEN
NOV 4 BRISTOL ROUGH TRADE
NOV 6 GLASGOW STEREO
NOV 7 NEWCASTLE THE CLUNY
NOV 8 LONDON OSLO

REVOCATION
ARCHSPIRE, SOREPTION, RIVERS OF NIHIL
DEC 16 LONDON UNDERWORLD
DEC 17 BIRMINGHAM MAMA ROUX
DEC 18 BRISTOL FLEECE
DEC 19 MANCHESTER REBELLION

VOIVOD
OCT 2 SOUTHAMPTON JOINERS
OCT 3 CARDIFF THE GLOBE
OCT 4 LEEDS TEMPLE OF BOOM
OCT 5 GLASGOW CATHOUSE
OCT 6 MANCHESTER REBELLION
OCT 7 LONDON UNDERWORLD

YOB
WIEGEDOOD
OCT 7 BRISTOL THE FLEECE
OCT 9 GLASGOW STEREO
OCT 10 LEEDS BRUDENELL SOCIAL CLUB
OCT 11 MANCHESTER GORILLA
OCT 12 LONDON THE GARAGE

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DEICIDE
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OXBOW
THE ART OF FALLING APART

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ALL THE MOST IN-DEPTH REVIEWS AND INTERVIEWS FROM THE OUTER LIMITS!

HELL ON EARTH

ANAAL NATHRAKH

BIRMINGHAM'S ORACLES OF OBLIVION HEAD FOR THE TRENCHES

Anaal Nathrakh (left to right): Dave Hunt, Mick Kenney

ANAAL NATHRAKH

SUBTERRANEA
GOING UNDERGROUND

THE TRENCH RESISTANCE

Both a British institution and volatile chroniclers of our ignominious age, Anaal Nathrakh have now found harrowing parallels with the horrors of World War I

WORDS: DOM LAWSON • PICTURES: MARIE KORNER

If history truly does have a tendency to repeat itself, then we should all be extremely worried right now. You don't have to be a dedicated historian to see the parallels between the early 20th century's descent into madness and the surge of extremism and division playing out around the world today. 2018 marks 100 years since the end of World War I: an anniversary to celebrate, perhaps, but also an opportunity to truly confront the hideous reality of that four-year conflict. Right on cue, Anaal Nathrakh have made a new album that draws direct inspiration from thoughts conjured by the centenary, via the poems of Wilfred Owen and the letters of DH Lawrence. Consistently one of extreme metal's most thoughtful and eloquent subversives, vocalist Dave 'V.I.T.R.I.O.L.' Hunt regards the embracing of this timeliest of subjects as a simple matter of necessity.

"It seemed to me that the centenary of WWI possibly wasn't regarded as being as impactful and relevant to today's world as I thought it was," he explains. "Mick [Kenney, guitarist and creative comrade] and I have always talked together about what it must have been like to be in the trenches. It's such a strong idea that we've had in common in our heads and it really seems like it was Hell on Earth. Also, there's the fact that I remembered poems that I'd done at school. I know a lot of people don't necessarily take anything in at school and there's plenty that I didn't take in, but these poems really stuck with me. So this feeling of wanting to do something that recognised the centenary, those poems came to the fore. I mean, the poems, particularly *Dulce Et Decorum Est*, they're so *powerful*..."

Widely regarded as the greatest of the WWI poems, Wilfred Owen's *Dulce Et Decorum Est* will be familiar to a decent majority of people educated in the UK. A chilling, grotesque and pitiless description of life on the frontline, it stands in stark contrast to much of the mawkish, misty-eyed twaddle that often takes the place of genuine reflection upon war's horrors. In a sense, *Dulce Et Decorum Est* reads like an early death metal lyric; mortality's spectre is omnipresent and Wilfred's focus never strays from the insanity around him.

"It sort of does sound a bit death metal, yeah," Dave chuckles. "It's definitely towards the more *well-written* end of death metal, though, ha ha! But yeah, just look how brutal it is... 'His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin' and 'froth-corrupted lungs'... oh god, it's a nightmare just to read it. It just seemed perfect for us, because we *know* what Anaal Nathrakh is. It's not going to be a stroll in the park thematically on the *best* of days, and certainly not when we've got the bit between our teeth with something as profound as the World War I stuff."

> "THE SOLDIERS IN THE WAR POEMS, THEY'RE *US*"
>
> DAVE HUNT ON THE PRESSING NEED FOR REMEMBRANCE

The evils of war have been an integral part of extreme metal's thematic vocabulary from the very start, but it's rare for a death or black metal album to dig as deeply into the ugly truth of armed conflict as Dave and Mick do on *A New Kind Of Horror*. Where most bands use war stories as a convenient vehicle for endless blastbeats and fantastic declarations of violent intent, the Nathrakh way has always been both left-of-centre and grounded in cold, harsh reality.

"For us, alongside all the imagery, the strongest point that came out of the whole idea was this notion of 'There but for the grace of God go I...'," Dave says. "They are *us*, these people you're reading about. They're not strange people from hundreds and hundreds and years ago with whom we have little in common. They're *us*. There are a lot of things going on today that seem to echo the early 20th century really alarmingly, so combine all that and it all builds up into a head of steam that came out in the form of an album!" he laughs.

And what an album it is: 33 minutes of pulverising, controlled chaos, *A New Kind Of Horror* is immediately recognisable as the strongest album of Anaal Nathrakh's career to date. The band have produced plenty of great records before, but this one feels more ruthlessly focused, streamlined and meticulous crafted than any of its predecessors. They haven't sounded this terrifying since their debut, *The Codex Necro*, back in 2001. From the exuberant exploiting of Dave's increasingly versatile vocal arsenal to the sustained rush of Mick Kenney's artful riffing, it suggests that having such a strong emotional connection with the album's subject matter has pushed both men to new heights. Not that you will ever get Dave to start blowing smoke up his own arse, of course. There will be no lavish party to celebrate the band's 20th anniversary, not least because Dave was blissfully unaware that the milestone was impending in the first place.

"Yeah, I honestly didn't realise until someone mentioned it to me a few weeks ago," he grins. "But I remember when I was a kid at school, I used to listen to *Decade Of Aggression*, and the fact that Slayer had managed *10* years at the time was clearly a big deal. So yes, it's great that we've managed to do this for so long, but to us it doesn't feel like it's *that* long. We still feel like we're 19 and doing everything, if not for the first time then for the second or third. We don't feel like veterans. This album doesn't feel like a landmark because

SUBTERRANEA
GOING UNDERGROUND

we're concentrating on what's in it, rather than what it stands for."

In a sense, Anaal Nathrakh are the ultimate musical middle finger to the social media era: a band that have neither been consumed by an apathetic mainstream nor by the squinting elitists of the ultra-underground. Instead, they have managed to evolve and prosper, largely on their own terms and protected by a very British sense of self-awareness and the blackest of humour. Although *A New Kind Of Horror* is plainly not an album with many frivolous jokes to impart, the underlying preposterousness of music this wilfully extreme seems to be an integral part of the Anaal Nathrakh ethos. If you didn't laugh, you would run screaming into traffic, right?

"Yeah, I know what you mean. Taking the piss is almost the flipside of the coin to what we do," Dave states. "We're trying to point these things out in as graphic and strenuous a way as possible. Satire does something with quite similar motivations, I think, if you read Frankie Boyle's columns and stuff like that. I believe someone once asked [legendary comic and satirist] Peter Cook if satire could be effective, and he said, 'Well, it sorted out the 1930s!' Ha ha ha! So it doesn't necessarily change anything, but that doesn't mean you should stop."

WWI is often referred to as "the war to end all wars", the suffocating irony of that phrase tacitly but routinely acknowledged. If we are as incapable of learning from our mistakes as it appears, albums as poignant, pointed and potent as *A New Kind Of Horror* must surely hold some additional value beyond their ability to bludgeon and exhilarate. As they reluctantly approach veteran status, Anaal Nathrakh are becoming more lethally effective and, thus, more important than ever, as their well of disgust, despair, piss and vinegar grows deeper and deeper.

"Yeah, I'm thinking of changing my middle name to Sarson's!" Dave laughs. "Absolutely, we have gallons of piss, vinegar, razorblades and several different colours of bile. To me it just gets worse, it doesn't get *less*. The fury becomes more profound and deeper and possibly slightly less obvious, as you get older. But that's how getting older works. The more you know, the more you understand and the more there is to feel about in an Anaal Nathrakh frame of mind." ✠

***A NEW KIND OF HORROR* IS RELEASED ON SEPTEMBER 28 VIA METAL BLADE**

Mick and Dave: learning from our past

"OUR FURY BECOMES MORE PROFOUND AND DEEPER AS WE GET OLDER"

DAVE HUNT ON HIS ROLE AS THE SAGE OF RAGE

THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNEW IT

Dave Hunt's three most unforgettable dystopian movies

THREADS

[1984]

"Almost no one knows about it, unless you were someone who saw it on the TV in 1984 or whenever it was. It was BBC drama about a nuclear bomb going off over Sheffield. I thought it was significant that it didn't take place in London or New York. It was somewhere really relatable. It's an utterly fucking terrifying film."

THE TERMINATOR

[1984]

"Those films can be a bit cheesy at times, but the first film is incredible. It's got depth that I don't think people realise it's got. I do think there's a small undercurrent of questioning sentience. There's a scene where he cuts his eyeball out into a sink, and then he puts the glasses on and looks in the mirror and checks his hair. That tiny thing humanises him or at least makes him not *just* a machine. It seems a plausible future to me!"

1984

[1984]

"I don't think you can necessarily wring every last drop of a book like that and put it into a film, but they did a really good job of trying. John Hurt's face... it's a thing of beauty just by itself. Just to make a film of that book... that book is so important and something everyone should be exposed to, so to make a decent fist out of the film, that was an important step. A film can help make it concrete for more people."

LEECHED - YOU TOOK THE SUN WHEN YOU LEFT

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COMING THIS AUTUMN : *New albums* from **PSYCROPTIC**, **FOUR STROKE BARON** and **MARTY FRIEDMAN** LIVE

Blast Indiscretions

Washington DC's Pig Destroyer are one of grindcore's top power players, but even two decades in, they're still subtly altering its DNA

WORDS: CONNIE GORDON

They may not always be heralded as such, but Pig Destroyer are left-of-centre grindcore outliers. Formed by guitarist Scott Hull in 1997 as a side-project to what was then his main band, Agoraphobic Nosebleed, Pig Destroyer were designed to "bring back what grindcore should be," despite their moniker's jocular history. Legend has it that Scott, vocalist J.R. Hayes and ex-drummer Brian Harvey were discussing what to christen their new venture while waiting in line for a roller coaster. The goal was to conjure up "the most absurd punk rock name imaginable". Taking inspiration from the furore caused by Body Count and their pièce de African-American résistance, *Cop Killer*, things got silly and Pig Destroyer was settled upon.

The band's early discography was littered with short, sharp blasts of grind that rarely surpassed the 60-second mark unless covers of influential artists like Melvins, Carcass or the Stooges were embarked upon. Then, there was the glaring omission of a bass player. It was a move not unheard of in underground grind from the likes of Anal Cunt and Discordance Axis, but once Pig Destroyer caught the ear of Relapse Records for 2001's *Prowler In The Yard* album, the concept of the bass-less power trio suddenly had a bigger spotlight. It was also that album where the songs got more involved, lengthier, more complex and diverse. J.R. suddenly had a wider avenue to explore his favourite transgressive themes and authors and confront his personal demons during a wholesale push of the lyrical envelope.

Full-length strength after full-length strength followed: 2004's *Terrifyer*, 2007's *Phantom Limb* and 2012's *Book Burner*. Each married darkened imagery and traumatic subject matter with a shaking of grindcore's foundations. Sprinkled amid those LPs were *Natasha* and *Mass & Volume* EPs, which explored ambient noise, funereal doom, caustic sludge and noisy power electronics, hinting that Pig Destroyer were feeling confined by the precedent set by their own albums.

This brings us to *Head Cage*, the band's first album in six years and one that ushers in a new age. 'PxDx' are now what Scott facetiously calls "a real band" with long-time member Blake Harrison (keyboards/samples/noise) joined by Misery Index/Scour drummer Adam Jarvis, and Adam's cousin and bass player John Jarvis (Scour/Agoraphobic Nosebleed).

"Nothing has changed procedurally, but the writing style *has* changed," explains Scott. "This is the first time I've been able to write from scratch to Adam's strengths and with a bassist in mind. For a long time, I haven't wanted to be the only guy holding down the music end and being able to write with a bass was incredibly freeing. I still write everything and hand it to the dudes to check out and learn, but it's definitely opened up what I've been able to do."

The freedom allotted to Scott has resulted in difference and progression. These include *House Of Snakes*' homage to the backwards guitar intro for Metallica's *Blackened* ("I asked the guys if it sounded like a rip-off or a tribute. Enough of them said tribute, so we went with it"), the colossal 70s rock of *Circle River* (described as "deceiving because it sounds like repeating measures, but it's actually one long, nuanced riff") and a host of mid-tempo numbers that would make the band virtually unrecognisable to fans of the 18 songs blazed out in 19 minutes on 1998 debut *Explosions In Ward 6*.

"There's a reason this album took six years!" he laughs. "I wanted to change things up to add different elements into our live set. We have a million songs that are fast and I wanted to add more mid-paced, groovy songs. I spent a lot of time writing outside of my grindcore and thrash comfort zone with the original edict being that there weren't going to be blastbeats or thrash beats. That's not how it turned out. Eventually my bandmates were like, 'You still gotta make it a Pig Destroyer record!'

"We repeated ourselves a bit with *Book Burner*," he continues. "With this record I wanted to dig deeper. I put this material through a rigorous vetting process. I approached these songs like an author with endless revisions, not settling for anything I didn't think was bulletproof."

Where Scott is responsible for the musical and sonic direction as chief songwriter and behind-the-board production work, J.R. is the band's aesthetic and thematic authority. He's spent a good portion of the 200-plus songs Pig Destroyer have written exploring transgressive fiction and shrouded real-life tales, often blurring a dark and stormy line between the thoughts twisting his psyche, internalised philosophical battles, past relationships, fantastical tales and actual ventures of questionable legality and morality. With Scott taking decisively different musical steps on *Head Cage*, the frontman figured it was also time to spread his wings.

"I've tried to move away from the usual, but it's still coming from me, through my lens," he intones. "Some of the stuff could've been on our last couple of records, but Scott was going out of his way to make every song its own unique thing, so I wanted to follow suit. There a couple pieces of fiction, a couple are semi-political; I tried to make it as all over the place as I could."

Head Cage has J.R. growling and barking worldly observations, harrowing horror narratives and even some admitted goofiness during *The Adventures Of Jason And J.R.* ("It's a story about me and Jason Hodges from Suppression going to see Iron Lung, and what happens after that…").

In 2018, our social climate is on sensitivity high alert. People are offended by harmless slights and the subsequent social media venting about outraged sensibilities often results in protests and witch hunts. Residually, an artist may contemplate self-censorship in order to avoid hassle and/or controversy. It would appear J.R. isn't concerned.

"When I'm writing I try to be honest and not say anything I don't mean. In my experience, if someone doesn't like something, fuck 'em! It's fine if people disagree, but I'm not going to tell people what they want to hear. We're in a tough era – everybody wants everything homogenised. They don't want to be pissed off. People want the world to be black and white and it's not."

And neither is *Head Cage* a black-and-white offering for fans of extreme music and grindcore.

"I thought everything Scott presented to us was good," he enthuses, "it's just that if you make the record blastbeats all the way through, it's hard to make it memorable. I feel there's a pretty good mix and it's interesting throughout. We'll probably get some shit for having fewer blastbeats, but in the long run it makes the ones we do have more impactful. It's ultimately about whether the songs are good or not." ✠

"WE'RE IN A TOUGH ERA BECAUSE EVERYBODY WANTS EVERYTHING HOMOGENISED"

J.R. HAYES DEFENDS HIS RIGHT TO OFFEND

***HEAD CAGE* IS OUT NOW VIA RELAPSE**

SUBTERRANEA
GOING UNDERGROUND

Pig Destroyer (left-right): Blake Harrison, Scott Hull, John Jarvis, Adam Jarvis, J.R. Hayes

Siege Of Power: death metal legends assemble!

FEARSOME DEATH/PUNK DIATRIBES!

SIEGE OF POWER

Dutch death metal mavens get aggro with Autopsy linchpin

WORDS: DOM LAWSON

No one could accuse Chris Reifert of being lazy. In 2018 alone, the man best known as Autopsy's bellowing drummer has released albums with his new psych rock band Painted Doll *and* his hardcore punk crew Violation Wound, and he's not stopping there. Founded by Asphyx guitarist Paul Baayens, ex-Asphyx drummer Bob Bagchus and bassist Theo van Eekelen (ex-Hail Of Bullets), Siege Of Power are a thunderous throwback to the late 80s, when the lines between hardcore and death metal were routinely blurred. Shrewdly, they recruited fellow veteran Reifert as their vocalist, even though he already had a fairly full diary…

"Sometimes it's hard to say no to your friends and I guess I've known Bob since 1987 or something," Chris chuckles. "I know the guys were doing a project called First Class Elite, but that was all I knew. Then I saw Asphyx play in Oakland last year and they mentioned their singer had bailed out on them. I was talking to Paul and we'd had a few drinks. He said, 'We need a singer for this project!' and I was like, 'Yeah, sure!' They're my buddies and it sounded cool. Little did I know that I had to write all the lyrics too! In the end they wrote 20 songs and that's a lot, ha ha! I just jumped in at the deep end and did it and I think it came out great."

Cheerfully diversifying his portfolio as he rattles through his fourth decade in extreme music, Chris has the perfect gruff snarl to complement his Siege Of Power bandmates' defiantly old-school racket. A sideways, death metal salute to crossover legends like S.O.D., Carnivore, Amebix, Discharge and (as their name suggests) early Napalm Death, debut album *Warning Blast* adheres to a gritty, monochrome punk rock aesthetic that has necessarily nudged their vocalist into new lyrical territory.

> "This is about all the shit that pisses me off"
>
> CHRIS REIFERT

"Whatever the music sounds like or what the theme of the band is, you kinda need to follow through with the lyrics," he notes. "Autopsy obviously has to be gore, horror and weird stuff. So the lyrical content's got to fit, but these guys gave me a free licence to do whatever I wanted, which was cool. I came up with some ideas on the fly and scratched them down, and it's pretty much about all the shit that pisses me off, in the world or in my life. It's its own little world. Every band has one!"

With all four members of the band otherwise engaged with myriad other projects, Siege Of Power are unlikely to become a touring band or even to make another record. But, as Chris notes with a wry grin, life has a habit of throwing unexpected opportunities into your path.

"This is a one-time, one album thing to look back on and think, 'Man, that was cool!' But who knows, man? Life is weird. Getting Autopsy back together was a big one. We swore up and down for 15 years that we'd never fucking do it, and then of course we did, so we'll see what happens later. Either way, Siege Of Power is fun! I don't have any other skills, man, so music is all I've got."

LINEUP: Chris Reifert (vocals), Bob Bagchus (drums), Paul Baayens (guitar), Theo van Eekelen (bass)
HOME TOWNS: Oldenzaal, Netherlands/Oakland, California
SOUNDS LIKE: Deathly crossover brutecore with its heart in the old school – not surprising given the pedigree of the lineup.
FOR FANS OF: Carnivore, Tau Cross, Memoriam
CURRENT RELEASE: *Warning Blast (Metal Blade, 2018)*
WEBSITE: metalblade.com/siegeofpower

Dödsrit: pining for a safe haven

BEAUTIFUL, BLACKENED CRUSTCORE!

DÖDSRIT

Former hardcore artist finds solace in the forest

WORDS: CHERYL CARTER

Black metal in 2018 is developing along very different lines from the classic second wave of the early 90s, taking inspiration from multiple sources that were never in the original blueprint. Dödsrit look set to become a frontrunner. A solo project by multi-instrumentalist Christoffer Öster, it was created after the dissolution of his previous band Totem Skin. Needing an outlet for ideas, he gathered elements of hardcore, post-rock and crust – derived from his love of bands such as Cult Of Luna, Tragedy and Fall Of Efrafa – to bring black metal screaming into the future.

Spirit Crusher achieves that goal with a sound that transports you to the centre of the forest with only the trees and the night for company, with glorious moments of shimmering guitar trying to light the way through. It takes a new and personal path away from black metal's traditional hunting grounds, circumnavigating Öster's woodland home of Dalarna in Sweden, and bringing the foundations of his musical education to the fore.

"I would like to think my basic core is hardcore," Öster explains. "But I guess what people hear is black metal or post-metal and I owe so much to that kind of music. It plays a huge part in my life and if I can make something that brings the same kind of joy I feel when I listen to my favourite bands to anyone, I'm happy with that."

Spirit Crusher is introspective in nature and, considering its evocative title, it's no surprise that the record is draped in themes of isolation and darkness. Where does such a suggestive title come from?

"It comes from the idea that people in your everyday life can drain and suck the will to live out of you," Öster says. "The negativity always floats around you. Sometimes you kind of lose hope for humanity, you know? So I try to spend as much time in nature as I possibly can."

Solitude has never sounded so good.

LINE-UP: Christoffer Öster (all instruments)
HOME TOWN: Dalarna, Sweden
SOUNDS LIKE: Black metal meditating on its future and finding solace in glistening post-rock and caustic hardcore.
FOR FANS OF: Cult Of Luna, Der Weg Einer Freiheit, Fall Of Efrafa
CURRENT RELEASE: *Spirit Crusher (Prosthetic, 2018)*
WEBSITE: www.facebook.com/DODSRIT

Pigs Pigs Pigs Pigs Pigs Pigs Pigs are on a roll

BOAR-BEFRIENDING SLUDGE/ PSYCH!

PIGS PIGS PIGS PIGS PIGS PIGS PIGS

Newcastle noisemongers commit to deadly sins

WORDS: KEZ WHELAN

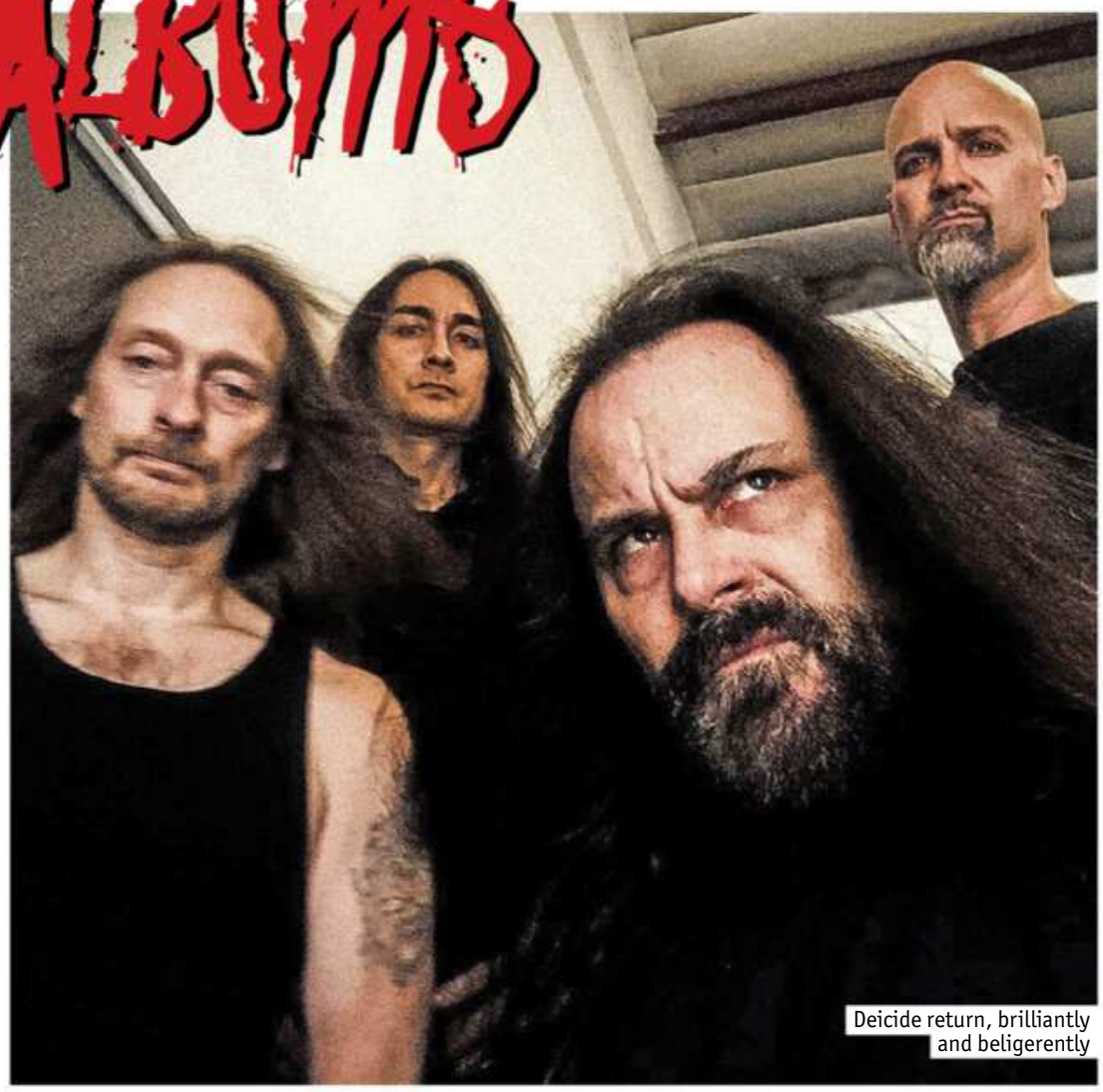
"Some things just can't be fully explained, like why The Golden Ratio creates aesthetically pleasing designs in nature and art," begins vocalist Matt Baty, explaining the reason behind *that* moniker. "Say our bandname out loud. It just seems natural to end on the seventh 'Pigs'. Any less and it'd be understated, any more and that'd just be silly. Is the number seven divine? I don't know, but it definitely feels right saying 'Pigs' seven times."

Born out of the same Newcastle noise-rock scene that produced Khüunt and Blown Out, the quintet belt out towering psych-doom riffs with speaker-blowing force and sweaty punk energy, especially on new album, *King Of Cowards*, the follow-up to 2017's *Feed The Rats*.

"We began writing *...Cowards* during a break in a tour. We rented a remote converted barn in the Italian countryside and spent time going over rough ideas, forming the album while we tried our best to make friends with wild boar and I made the most of a wah pedal," says guitarist Adam Ian Sykes. "It's a lot darker than *Feed The Rats*, especially lyrically, but levity is always at the back of our minds. It seems like a natural progression but with a similar approach that comes naturally to us, an insular approach that relies on each other rather than outside influence.

"The lyrics on the album are inspired by the seven deadly sins," Matt continues. "I was interested in why clear-cut definitions of what sins are exist and how guilt and remorse can be used as a form of control. Guilt can be a debilitating feeling. The album title relates specifically to greed, arguably the most destructive of the sins. I thought about the elites who are hungry for power, control and wealth. I consider them cowards, fearful of equality."

LINE-UP: Matt Baty (vocals), Sam Grant (guitar), Adam Ian Sykes (guitar), John-Michael Hedley (bass), Christopher Morley (drums)
HOME TOWN: Newcastle-Upon-Tyne
SOUNDS LIKE: Sludgy, lagered-up psych riff worship.
FOR FANS OF: Melvins, Hey Colossus, Butthole Surfers
CURRENT RELEASE: *King Of Cowards (Rocket Recordings, 2018)*
WEBSITE: www.Pigsx7.co.uk



Deicide return, brilliantly and beligerently

Deicide

Overtures Of Blasphemy

CENTURY MEDIA

Glen Benton's back and he still hates Jesus

DESPITE MORE THAN a few moments in their career when it seemed like the wheels were falling off, Deicide re-emerge in 2018 with their grim allure more or less intact. It certainly helps that the band's last few albums have all been worthy additions to a catalogue that had plainly dipped in quality after an initial flush of youthful intensity. 2013's *In The Mind Of Evil*, in particular, suggested that Glen Benton and Steve Asheim's enthusiasm for doing this stuff – and doing it with more ferocity than anyone else – had been rekindled, the arrival of new guitarist Kevin Quirion the self-evident catalyst. That momentum has clearly continued into Deicide's 12th album; *Overtures Of Blasphemy* is easily the most vicious thing the band have released since *Serpents Of The Light*, or perhaps even before that. Equally exciting is the fact that, glory days nostalgia notwithstanding, these are the most memorable songs the band have penned since that immortal self-titled debut back in 1990.

Anyone hoping for a simple retread of past glories is in for a disappointment, however. From opening declaration of intent, *One With Satan*, onwards, this is the fruit of the more straightforward and traditional approach Deicide have toyed with since 2006's *The Stench Of*

Redemption. There are no bewildering, *Legion*-style riff-mazes, just flat-out, three-minute extreme metal anthems, almost all boasting catchy, bellowed refrains and solos that owe more to KK Downing than Trey Azagthoth. But Deicide still beat the piss out of most other death metal bands, from any era, when it comes to sounding like they mean it and making every riff feel like a knife to the eyeball. Before death metal splintered into different substrains, *this* is what we wanted from it: hymns to Satan, played by maniacs and as proudly, belligerently metal as all unholy fuck.

8

FOR FANS OF: Vader, Skeletal Remains, Vomitory

DOM LAWSON

Aborted

TerrorVision

CENTURY MEDIA

Belgium's beloved gorehounds get their fingers dirty once more

After a brief flirtation with politically charged material, these Belgian horror hounds are back to more familiar territory on their 10th full-length. Featuring references to 80s B-movies and the work of Dario Argento, *TerrorVision* is heaving with decapitating riffs and boasts enough hooks to rival the *Candyman* franchise. Sounding more focused and as sharp as ever thanks to an intense pre-production period, the year-plus of blood, sweat and gore has paid off as the death metal veterans are in vintage form, particularly on the manic yet melodic *Farewell To The Flesh* and thrash-tinged tour de force *A Whore D'Oeuvre Macabre*. Drummer/human octopus Ken Bedene stakes another claim to being one of the best tub-thumpers in the game and his powerful, precise performances on *Exquisite Convinous Drama* and the fiendishly catchy *Squalor Opera* are jaw-dropping.

7

FOR FANS OF: Autopsy, Herder, Cannibal Corpse

EDWIN McFEE

Besra

Anhedonia

TEMPLE OF TORTUROUS

Callistro frontman enters a higher state of isolation

Initially beginning as a solo project of Callisto's Johannes Nygård, who found that this previous band wasn't fulfilling his musical needs, Besra took a few years to take on the form we hear on *Anhedonia*. The journey that Besra takes us on is tainted with darkness and emotion, laid in solid foundations of sludge and post-rock and given life by vocalist Hannes Hietarinta's powerful voice. The soaring guitars of *Next Chapter* build in waves, playing with the quiet/loud dynamic with ease and ramping up the drama with each rise and fall of sound. Isolation is a key theme on *Anhedonia* and with final track *Pariah* churning with emotional turmoil at every turn, Besra show us exactly what makes us human – the need for contact, for acceptance and ultimately love.

7

FOR FANS OF: Amenra, Pelican, Cult Of Luna

CHERYL CARTER

Bosse-de-Nage

Further Still

THE FLENSER

Post-black frontrunners get overrun by the pack

San Francisco's Bosse-de-Nage could be considered early adopters of post-black metal, having released their first demo – cunningly titled *Demo I* – back in 2006. They clearly strive for an experimental and expansive sound but much of the material on the band's fifth album falls flat. Opening track *The Trench* is a prime example; two clean chords lead us into a false sense of security before a barrage of blastbeats and a wall of guitars come crashing in, although it never leads anywhere particularly interesting. There are deviations from the all-out black metal assault on tracks like *Vestiges* and *My Shroud*, but they tend to be either fleeting, uninspired or both. If you simply can't get enough of post-black metal, then this is worth checking out, but in a subgenre with some seriously fierce competition, it's hard to imagine anyone considering *Further Still* essential listening.

5

FOR FANS OF: Deafheaven, Wolves In The Throne Room, Oathbreaker

REMFRY DEDMAN

Buñuel
The Easy Way Out
LA TEMPESTA/GOODFELLAS

Desperate times call for Oxbow's Uncle Eugene

Fans of Oxbow will be familiar with Eugene S Robinson's warped yet hyper-realistic worldview, but *The Easy Way Out* offers the terrifying prospect of his psyche fully unleashed. As on their explosive *A Resting Place For Strangers* debut, Buñuel deal in succinct but flailing bursts of angular noise rock, but this time around the tempos are more varied and Eugene's profane declarations more urgent and desperate. Opening with the lumbering dirges *Boys To Men* and *The Hammer The Coffin*, there are definite shades of early Melvins here, albeit battered out of shape by the turbulence of the frontman's vocals. Normal, savage service is resumed on *Dial Tone*, as scraped, no-wave guitars burst through a dirt-punk melee. *Happy Hour* and *Shot* are direct elbows to the gut. But it's *The Sanction* that will wrench the breath from you: seven minutes of oppressive tension, delivered with a grin.

8

FOR FANS OF: Oxbow, Melvins, The Body

DOM LAWSON

Dödsrit
Spirit Crusher
PROSTHETIC

Swedish crust-punk brews second batch of blackened nightmare fuel

The anxiety inducing-formula that Dödsrit mastermind Christoffer Öster has conjured on second album, *Spirit Crusher*, ambitiously expands upon last year's self-titled record that slammed together the now inseparable kvlt bromance of black metal and shoegaze. The former Totem Skin guitarist captures the harsh, atmospheric isolation of the recent post-metal era with unsettling ease that sucks you right in, only to crush every bone in your body seconds later. Opening opus *Aura* sets the tone pretty sharpish. Met by blastbeats and riffs wrapped in barbed wire that would love to tear your face off, where *Spirit Crusher* really hits home is the unnerving melancholy that lingers throughout these 45 minutes of quality bleak escapism. A bludgeoning glimpse into the future of post-black metal that pushes further into the void.

8

FOR FANS OF: Winterfylleth, Møl, Wolves In The Throne Room

HYWEL DAVIES

From The Bogs Of Aughiska
Mineral Bearing Veins
APOCALYPTIC WITCHCRAFT

Ireland's dark ambient explorers head deeper into the black

The Burren region of County Clare, Ireland is beautiful in its bleakness. Ancient energies still permeate its rough-hewn landscape and the rocks stand in judgement. Some weather-beaten locals still speak of folklore and deeply ingrained superstition, both of which have been explored across From The Bogs Of Aughiska's discography. For instance, *The One Whitethorn Bush* from this latest album is a recording of a seanchaí sharing a foreboding tale about a fairy tree. *Mineral Bearing Veins* is steeped in such mythology and history, and while FTBOA usually favour a dark ambient sprawl, this LP features a prominent second-wave BM streak. As a result, with its enveloping field recordings, harsh riffing, passing shadows of droning synth, spoken-word sections and uniquely Irish atmosphere, *MBV* is easily songwriter Conchúir O'Drona's most interesting and stylistically diverse release to date.

7

FOR FANS OF: Lustmord, Burzum, Nadja

DEAN BROWN

Horrendous
Idol
SEASON OF MIST

Former death metal revivalists find a new lease of life

Even if you overlook the hiccups, the career arc of these Philly thrashers has been an interesting one so far. Having initially ridden the classic death metal wave of the early 10s, with both HM-2 pedal-infused guitars and a Martin van Drunen clone on vocals, they then went off in ambitiously progressive direction with various results. But if 2015's *Anareta* felt too much like a confused bag of admittedly good riffs, their fourth LP – and first with a proper bass player, whose instrument takes the lion's share of the mix – sees them completing their metamorphosis. Swapping their most deathly leanings for a complex and catchy form of technical thrash-metal, its melodic sensibilities lean equally towards US and Scandi elders. Ten years in, served by seamless, imaginative arrangements, Horrendous hae finally reached their potential.

7

FOR FANS OF: At the Gates, Revocation, Voivod

OLIVIER BADIN

Emma Ruth Rundle finds a light in the dark

Emma Ruth Rundle
On Dark Horses
SARGENT HOUSE

Haunting dispatches from the road to redemption

2016'S HARROWINGLY PERSONAL *Marked For Death* album proved to be a word-of-mouth wonder, so it feels apt that *On Dark Horses* feels more spacious and soaring and more like the work of a collective (Young Widows guitarist Evan Patterson amd Dylan Nadon of Wovenhand are among the credited musicians here). Crucially, though, it remains intimate enough to showcase her hauntingly beautiful voice to its full capacity. There are also new influences; ambient folk rarely borrows from epic prog metal, but the bassline during the middle of *Control* builds much like Tool's *Lateralus* track. Where *Marked For Death* mirrored her traumatic mindset, with songs crashing over you like waves, here she inhabits a more reflective, accepting and positive headspace. The hypnotic *Light Song* builds as it expires, adding layers to slowly transform its funereal doom into something transfixingly uplifting. This feels as though it's coming to terms with the events of *Marked*... On the soothing slide guitar of final track *You Don't Have To Cry* she adds a crucial 'anymore' to the end of the song's title. Great artists often tell you their life story through their art, and *On Dark Horses* will be looked back on as a truly great 'tale of redemption' album.

8

FOR FANS OF: Chelsea Wolfe, Marissa Nadler, Marriages

STEPHEN HILL

Original Sins A CLASSIC ALBUM FROM THE DARKEST VAULT

Demilich Nespithe
NECROPOLIS, *1993*

Finnish death metal was still a work in progress when Demilich released their sole album in 1993. A great leap on from the pioneering contributions of scene leaders Abhorrence, Convulse and Amorphis, this wild combination of deathly, suppurating groove and extreme technicality was years ahead of its time. Spiritually closer to Deicide or Dismember, Demilich's progressive, brakes-off approach to death metal resulted in an inspired refinement of the Finnish sound that influenced everything that followed in its wayward wake. Made even more unforgettable by wilfully weird song titles like *The Sixteenth Six-Tooth Son Of Fourteen Four-Regional Dimensions (Still Unnamed)*, *Nespithe* is a true cult classic.

War stories: Anaal Nathrakh take to the trenches

Anaal Nathrakh

A New Kind Of Horror

METAL BLADE

Brummie hellblazers conjure anthems for doomed youth

UNABLE TO PULL on his mask in time, a soldier writhes, chokes and dies in agony as his comrades look on through the fumes of chlorine gas that pour into the trench. This harrowing account from World War I poet Wilfred Owen, ends sarcastically with the line "Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori", meaning 'How sweet and honourable it is to die for one's country', and it couldn't be more apt for the horrifying, sardonic nature of Anaal Nathrakh's new album, *A New Kind Of Horror* – an exploration of that most pointless and ghastly of conflicts 100 years on from the Armistice. The merciless, rolling barrage of blistering speed, operatic electronics, caustic riffs and Dave Hunt's unearthly vocal histrionics have been honed to perfection over their consistent recent efforts, with album 10 revelling in its bombast and sonic severity. While *Forward!*'s machine gun drums, tales of fallen troops and colossal riff is as succinct as the duo are likely to get, opener proper *Obscene As Cancer*, *The Apocalypse Is About You!* and *New Bethlehem/Mass Death Futures* scythe through the senses with their murderous wall of sound, ominous splendour and sorrowful motifs. Sounding as unhinged as ever, whether on the King Diamond-aping *The Reek Of Fear* or *The Horrid Strife*'s sinister manifestations, Hunt's range isn't overawed by the ambitious symphonic scale unleashed by Mick Kenney, withstanding the tsunami of choirs, industrial overtones and mournful black metal assault of theatrical closer *Are We Fit For Glory Yet? (The War To End Nothing)*. Though only memories and monuments remain of those who paid the ultimate sacrifice in the trenches, Anaal Nathrakh are keen to point out that the world remains a hostile, horrific place, full of new and looming malice. As ever, they've created the perfect soundtrack for a species that never learns from its greatest mistakes.

8

FOR FANS OF: Dimmu Borgir, Cattle Decapitation, Wilfred Owen

ADAM REES

Infera Bruo

Cerement

PROSTHETIC

Boston's progressive black metallers take a few steps back

Titled *Cerement* (the name for a wax burial shroud), Infera Bruo's third album does show signs of creative growth for the Cascadian black metal-indebted Boston act – particularly so on *Endnotes*, which recalls Tribulation's contemporary goth metal. However, outside of that track and the discordant prog of *Shroud Enigma*, some of the riffs and arrangements are underwhelming. For example, the intro, interlude and outro take up too much time for what they present: swirling noises, inert acoustic guitars, and the odd backbeat. The transitions of *The Lunar Pass* halt momentum through plodding doom instead of adding the intended dynamism, which is a pity since the interplay between the stately clean vocals and Ihsahn-esque snarls works. While further issues come from the underwhelming utilisation of the keyboards, and in contrast to their previous album, only *Scorne* shows Infera Bruo's propulsive BM side.

5

FOR FANS OF: Enslaved, Foscor, Cloak

DEAN BROWN

Madder Mortem

Marrow

DARK ESSENCE

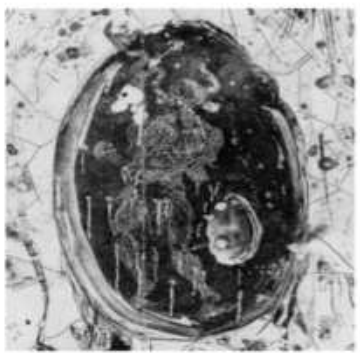
Long-running dark progressive denizens find a higher gear

Reliably impossible to pin down to any specific genre tag, Madder Mortem have long deserved greater acclaim. Fortunately, heavy music seems to have come around to the Norwegians' liberated way of thinking, which means that the band's seventh album stands a chance of reaching a wider audience than its predecessors. It certainly deserves to as this is a very obvious career peak, full of startling dynamics, irresistible melodrama and innumerable moments of vein-popping heaviness. Vocalist Agnete M Kirkevaag remains a not-so-secret weapon; on the grinding alt-prog of *Liberator* and *My Will Be Done*, her tumultuous roar provides a thrilling focus; amid the chameleonic sprawl of *Until You Return* and *Far From Home*'s blackened AOR, her ability to switch from angelic whisper to soulful howl is truly mesmerising. The sound of a unique band on the greatest form, *Marrow* will thrill you to the bone.

8

FOR FANS OF: Oceans Of Slumber, Opeth, Enslaved

DOM LAWSON



Malthusian

Across Deaths

INVICTUS PRODUCTIONS

Ireland's underground collective unleash a delirium-inducing debut

Malthusian, the Dublin-based black/death/doom act comprised of veteran members of the Irish underground scene, have honed their sound organically over a five-year course that's included one highly regarded 2013 demo, an EP released in 2015, and some enigmatic live shows. Finally, we're presented with their first full-length studio recording, and it does exactly what any strong debut should: it capitalises on the four-piece's potential completely. As expected, none of the five songs here traverse a linear path; Malthusian excel at crafting intricate compositions that take the listener through myriad torturous turns. Chilling, multi-headed screams, growls and rasps, as well as a suitably cavernous production enhance the hall-of-mirrors disorientation cast by churning instrumentation and labyrinthine song structures. If the malodorous and suffocating *Across Deaths* confirms anything, it's that Malthusian are among extreme metal's elite right now.

8

FOR FANS OF: Cruciamentum, Incantation, Esoteric

DEAN BROWN

SMALL MERCIES

SHORT BLASTS

Invocation

The Mastery Of The Unseen

IRON BONEHEAD

These Chilean occultists offer a filthy paean to 90s blackened death metal. Conjuring rotten passages of arcane alignment in the vein of forefathers Blasphemy, Incantation and Mystifier, this is a teaser for very promising abominations to come. **[8]**

LIAM YATES

Omenfilth

Hymns Of Diabolical Treachery

ETERNAL DEATH

A game of two halves, this: five thrilling blasts of grandiose, blackened filth followed by a 27-minute splurge of well-intended but ultimately aimless lo-fi squall'n'drone. The first half rules. **[6]**

DOM LAWSON

The Secret

Lux Tenebris

SOUTHERN LORD

The Secret's return is heralded with a hurricane of torrential black metal and noxious doom. It's held aloft with cruel hands but delivered with surprising subtlety – much like a pillow being pressed to the face of an unsuspecting sleeper. **[7]**

ALEX DELLER

Pigs Pigs Pigs Pigs Pigs Pigs Pigs

King Of Cowards

ROCKET RECORDINGS

Psychedelic stoner crew keep up their winning streak

Newcastle's Pigs x 7 have been a bit of an underground sensation for a few years now. Their three-track, 37-minute debut, *Feed The Pigs*, was embraced by those who like their swirling, psychedelic stoner rock grooves. This second album, while four minutes longer, feels more concise, spreading its ideas and jams over six songs that make a more gratifying listen. The lumbering opening riff to *Shockmaster* is a perfect entry point to the Pigs x 7 sound while *Thumbsucker* culminates in a hypnotic vortex of doom-laden riffs and vibrations. The rhythm section effortlessly capture the Butler/Ward swing that elevates them above many of their peers, especially when they have time to get locked into the hypnotising grooves of *A66* and closing track *Gloamer*.

7

FOR FANS OF: Hawkwind, Conan, Electric Wizard

REMFRY DEDMAN

Rebel Wizard

Voluptuous Worship Of Rapture And Response

PROSTHETIC

Melbourne's mad metal maven turns up the mayhem

Manifestly not right in the head, Rebel Wizard is turning negativity into a mind-frying new artform. This is a far-beyond-skewed version of black metal, steeped in the hissing squall of the old school, but driven by all manner of perverse urges and whims. *The Prophecy Came And It Was Soaked With The Common Fools Forboding* kicks off the descent into madness with excoriating guitar skree and warped NWOBHM hooks. It's an eccentric template that the Australian uses and abuses with great zeal. There are moments of blissful respite, too: despite its title, *Drunk On The Wizdom Of Unicorn Semen* begins in serene acoustic mode, before a blur of Maiden-tinged speed metal shatters the still. Best of all, the closing *Exhaustive Glory* reimagines the windswept pomp of *Hammerheart*-era Bathory as a dust-blasted battle with the elements, showcasing both refined method and festering madness.

8

FOR FANS OF: Sigh, Throne Of Katarsis, Mork

DOM LAWSON

Satan

Cruel Magic

METAL BLADE

Newcastle's resurrected NWOBHM heroes show their true grit

Having rematerialised in 2012 after a seven-year absence, NWOBHM underdogs Satan have wasted no time restoring their cult legacy. With numerous strong live performances and two successful albums following a near-30-year hiatus, new album *Cruel Magic* conjures the spirit of the band's earlier work, while still maintaining a relevant vitality. Retaining the band's signature heavy metal gallop and meat'n'potatoes proto-thrash, the band's spit'n'sawdust approach is more street-level revelry than stadium anthem pomp, an integrity that also extends to the production. Thankfully *Cruel Magic* is not an overtly compressed studio package, these veterans instilling a quality control to keep their double lead guitar turbulence as organic and raw as earlier work. Hail Satan!

8

FOR FANS OF: Angel Witch, Holocaust, Blitzkrieg

LIAM YATES

Sear Bliss

Letters From The Edge

HAMMERHEART

Hungary's black metal renegades prove bold as brass

Since the mid-90s these eccentric Hungarians have been quietly impressing anyone within earshot with their multi-faceted, atmospheric black metal, most famous for single-handedly rescuing the trombone from the world of comedy sound effects. Judiciously used,it ennobles every passage it appears in; *Seven Springs* even begins like something out of Miles Davis's *Sketches Of Spain*, the comparison extending to the mid-section's flamboyant flamenco finger-picking. Sear Bliss have by now struck a perfect balance between offbeat, arty sophistication and outright old-school savagery. Particularly powerful is the pairing of *Abandoned Peaks* – a stately doom throb, swirling with layers of curious instrumentation – and *Forbidden Doors*, divided neatly into a first half frothing with trad BM filth and fury and a second half of lachrymatory, funereal elegance. For the beard-stroking muso as much as the corpsepainted rivet-head, Sear Bliss continue to mature like a fine wine.

8

FOR FANS OF: Emperor, Bathory, Negura Bunget

CHRIS CHANTLER

My Favourite Artwork

DEMONAZ
Immortal
BATHORY
Blood Fire Death

"The cover was really massive and I've never seen anything like it since. I'd seen it in a metal magazine, but when I opened it and saw the cover on the double vinyl, it was amazing. There was some sort of originality to it, bringing in that old picture for this fantastic album."

Conan: once more into the void...

Conan

Existential Void Guardian

NAPALM

Neanderthal doomlords display their smarts

DESPITE THEIR SELF-CONSCIOUSLY primitive approach, Conan have managed to keep their "caveman battle doom" sounding fresh and imaginative for four full-lengths now. The latest is *Existential Void Guardian*, an almost impenetrably bleak plunge into the abyss that finds the trio toying with new ideas while continuing to play to their strengths. The visceral, upbeat – and exquisitely titled – *Volt Thrower*, for example, finds the trio riding a buoyant, almost militaristic groove, supplemented by new drummer Johnny King's stuttering staccato fills. That's not even the wildest excursion, either; after 2016's *Revengeance* experimented with faster songs and even the occasional blastbeat, this album goes one step further with the 54-second-long *Paincantation* – a disorientating grindcore assault that's as unexpected as it is thrilling, bolstered by the band's physically punishing guitar tone.

Conversely, Conan delve into some of their thickest, murkiest and slowest material since 2010's *Horseback Battle Hammer* EP here too, with the jet-black, tar-like expanses of songs such as *Eye To Eye To Eye*, the sprawlingly dense *Amidst The Infinite* and eerie, atmospheric closer *Eternal Silent Legend* oozing out of the speakers like wet cement, feeling suitably all-encompassing without outstaying their welcome. The production is a lot fuller and more robust than *Revengeance*'s rawer aesthetic too, adding an extra degree of weight to these already ludicrously hefty songs.

Once again, Conan have upped the ante in terms of heaviness whilst delivering an album that feels diverse, dynamic and extremely efficient, with all of these songs – with the exception of *Paincantation*'s joyously formless catharsis, perhaps – building to eminently satisfying climaxes. At no point here do the band sound like they're simply pushing air out of their Orange stacks for the sake of it, with every skull-rattling note feeling like a significant part of a much greater whole. The kings are back; long may they reign!

8

FOR FANS OF: Bongripper, Yob, High On Fire

KEZ WHELAN

Pig Destroyer: now with added bassist *and* 'songs'!

Pig Destroyer
Head Cage
RELAPSE

Washington DC's grindcore A-listers stir the pot

SOMETIMES, A GRINDCORE band come along with what normal people might call 'songs'. Six records deep, Pig Destroyer dare to dream. Because they've always been more than 'just' a grindcore band – whether it's the 38-minute, one-song *Natasha* EP or the Metallica-worthy guitar harmonies from their *Phantom Limb* opus, the Virginian filth-mongers run just behind Napalm Death when it comes to reappraising the genre.

On *Head Cage*, there are still a few tropes for sticklers. Silly samples are aplenty, *The Torture Fields* balances pure grind with groove-flecked Napalm-isms, and a phlegm-expunging *'BLEURGH!'* sits within *Trap Door Man* – but it's very much Pig Destroyer aiming for fans unknown. Like Decapitated's *Anticult*, or Behemoth's *The Satanist*, this is a toilet overflowing with the band's past, flushed down one compact pipe. It helps that they've finally got a bassist. It's taken 20 years, but some in-studio bottom end gives tracks like *Terminal Itch* and *House Of Snakes* an extra coating of menace. The former has newly instated five-stringer John Jarvis bring progressive, Pestilence-style runs to the table, while the latter sees him rumble below some *Heartwork*-era Carcass leads.

Basically, whether Pig Destroyer are going full-on Southern boogie-by-way-of-hardcore in *Circle River*, or getting their gang vocal on in a way that'd terrify Dripback during *Dark Train*, it's all glued together by J.R. Hayes. His grunts and squeals are more enunciated, barbed, *catchy*. You can actually hear what he's saying, as *Army Of Cops*' hoarse declaration impacts on a different level to his rabid, largely inaudible sermons from previous records.

So. *Head Cage*. More mid-paced. More focus on groove. Is it grindcore? Not in the traditional sense. But neither are Napalm Death. It's still extreme. Urgent, poignant, disgusting. The production is spot-on, the hooks stick, and it's heavy as fuck. This is Pig Destroyer – just not *exactly* how you remember.

8

FOR FANS OF: Napalm Death, Cattle Decapitation, Code Orange

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

Siege Of Power
Warning Blast
METAL BLADE

Transatlantic supergroup turn their hands to old-school thrash

Thanks to the wonders of internet, there are virtually no frontiers anymore between musicians. But the flipside is there's always a certain spontaneity lacking when the result wasn't collectively sweat upon in the same dirty and noisy rehearsal room. And that's exactly *Warning Blast*'s biggest flaw. Essentially this is a follow-up to the short-lived First Class Elite set up by Bob Bagchus with Paul Baayens (Asphyx, Hail Of Bullets) to celebrate late 80s crossover/thrashcore. But after switching name and gears for something far thrashier, they've replaced Martin van Drunen on the mic with Autopsy's Chris Reifert. Yet no matter how pissed off the latter sounds or how competent Baayens' riffs are, you can tell that this otherwise fine recording – spread over two continents – would have gained from being less the result of well-trained pros getting together for the show and more an actual band.

6

FOR FANS OF: Carnivore, Violation Wound, Celtic Frost

OLIVIER BADIN

Sumac
Love In Shadow
THRILL JOCKEY

Former Isis frontman takes his avant metallers into pastures new

Released hot on the heels of a Keiji Haino collaboration, *Love In Shadow* sees Sumac continuing to draw from a rich wellspring of creativity. Granted, it's far less freeform – and far easier to digest – than 2016's *What One Becomes*, but still exhibits the same restless, experimental spirit. If 20-minute opener *The Task* begins by burrowing into familiar ground with its jagged riffs, powerhouse drumming and craggy grumbles, it's not long before things get *weird*, with febrile, scattered rhythms entering the fray and jarring, jazz-influenced clatters giving the contorted riffing a run for its money. The album spreads and sprawls via a series of muscular contractions and troubled exhalations, finally ending on a note that seems more inspired by a Daniel Higgs banjo raga than anything 'typically' heavy. The results are masterful, strange and challenging. Thinking folks' metal, indeed.

8

FOR FANS OF: Old Man Gloom, The Necks, KEN mode

ALEX DELLER

Tomb Of Finland
Frozen Beneath
MIGHTY MUSIC

Morbid Finns bring some more beef to their doom

Being the second instalment in their sprouting doom/death catalogue, the conveniently named Finnish five-piece Tomb Of Finland have upped the beef factor to barbaric levels here. Taking a step away from their blackened roots and into bigger, more theatrical territory, the ambition and scale of what's trying to be achieved on *Frozen Beneath* surpasses its 2015 predecessor, *Below The Green*, comfortably. Taking what they have learned and adding a fuck-ton more bulk to the mix, this death march of doom does everything in its power to cram every second of its 46-minute runtime with riffs darker and thicker than Marmite that's been left out all night with the lid off. Unfortunately, as a result the pacing takes bit of a hit and with very little development to speak of, *Frozen Beneath* feels a little like more work than it should be.

7

FOR FANS OF: Amon Amarth, Bleeding Gods, God Dethroned

HYWEL DAVIES

Vreid
Lifehunger
SEASON OF MIST

Sogndal's black'n'roll veterans hit a new sweet spot

Vreid are a class act. This hasn't necessarily been evident at every level of production over the Norwegian black metallers' 14-year career, but *Lifehunger*'s gorgeous sleeve art is an indicator that this Season Of Mist debut is a sumptuous step up, even for a band who always seem to hit the spot musically. Vreid are obviously happy with the 'black'n'roll' tag, and they sure unleash an uproarious volley of fist-raising riffs and headbanging tempos – but *Lifehunger* has more depth and variety than that descriptor suggests. *In The Dead White*'s vocal lines and riff patterns the influence of Mille Petrozza is detectable, *Hello Darkness* has a mellow Witchcraft vibe, and pine-scented closing instrumental *Heimatt* takes us from aching melancholy to jubilant resolve via a string of twinkling guitar melodies.

8

FOR FANS OF: Satyricon, Immortal, Enslaved

CHRIS CHANTLER

Inspirations From Beyond

PAUL KENNEY
Fukpig

GORGOROTH
Under The Sign Of Hell

"This is a perfect album. It starts with a guitar being cranked up on a defective note; the snare is too loud and the vocals are drenched in distortion – perfection! I've been trying to make a racket as imposing as this for the last 20 years."

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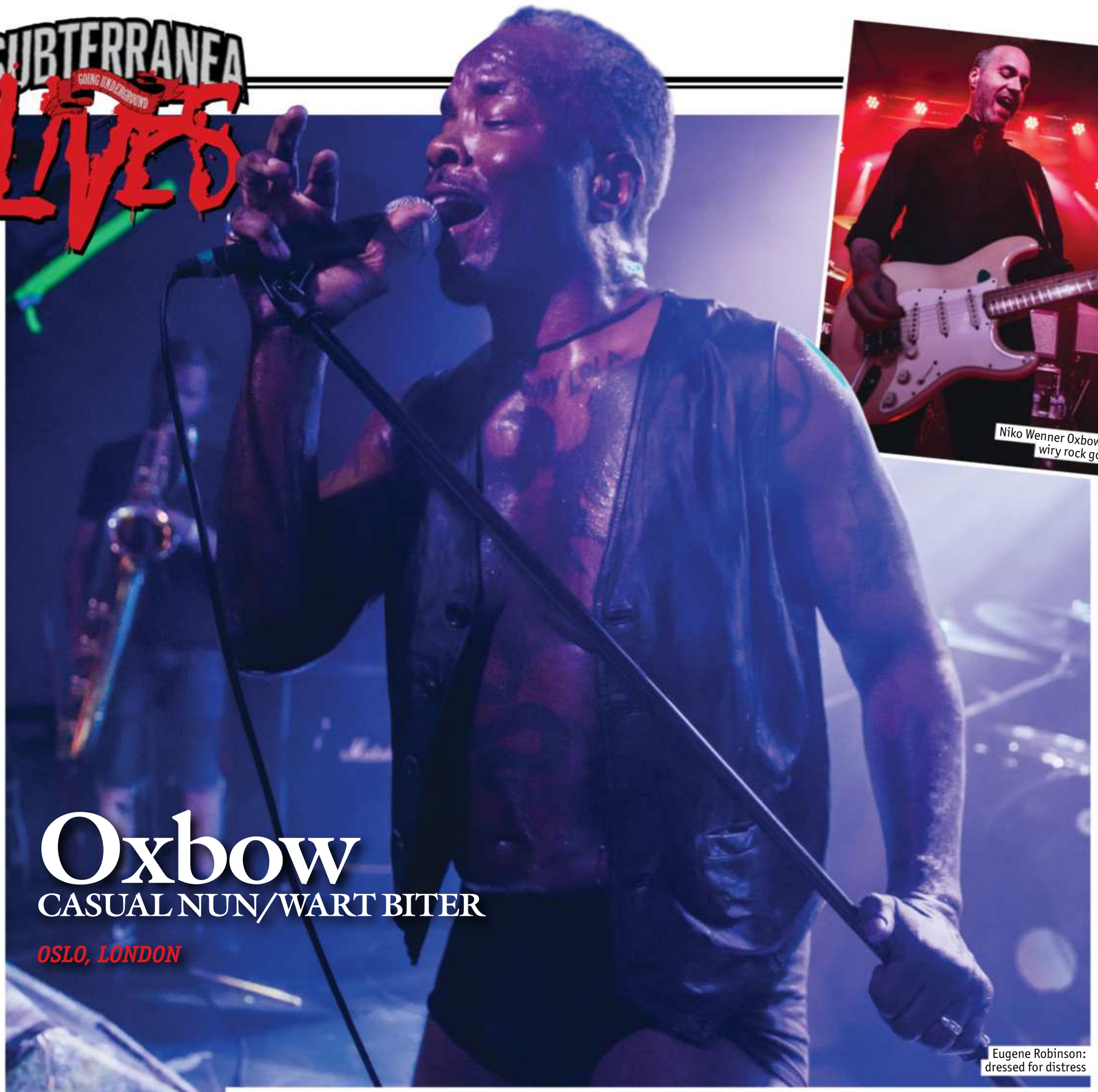
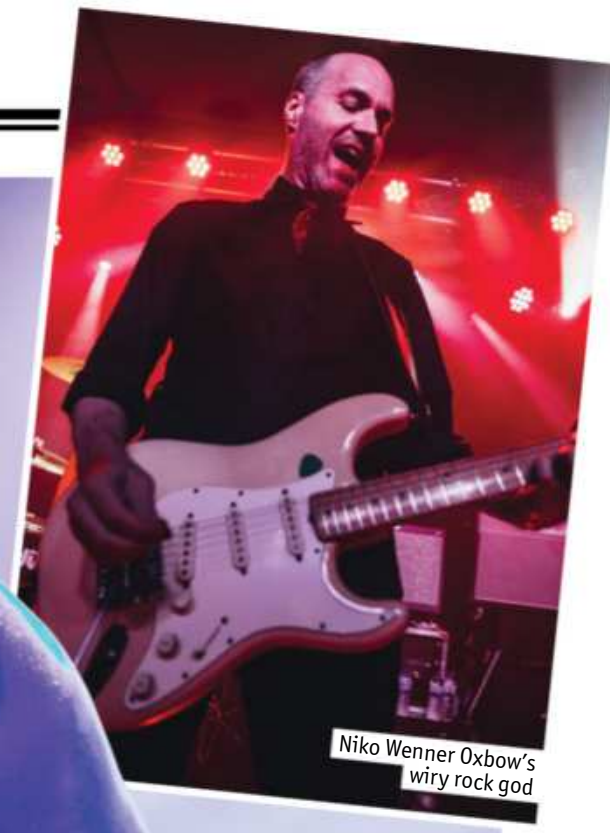




Niko Wenner Oxbow's wiry rock god

Oxbow

CASUAL NUN/WART BITER

OSLO, LONDON

Eugene Robinson: dressed for distress

SanFran firebrands refine the art of falling apart

IT SEEMS BOTH apt and slightly arch that an evening of avant extremity begins with a band whose debut release features a slimy pile of tripe by way of album art. Three-piece **WART BITER [6]** play a hooting, honking brand of aggro-jazz that's all bull elephant saxophone, broken Cylon synths and relentless, metronomic drumwork. Heaven knows it ain't nice, but it certainly is *clever*. **CASUAL NUN**'s **[6]** seemingly endless support slot stints seem to be paying off, with the band luring a sizeable crowd to witness their sonic peculiarities. 'Repetition as open hostility' seems to be the mantra, and anyone who fancies the idea of Hawkwind, Hey Colossus and The Stooges sharing food poisoning in a tumble dryer would be well advised to investigate the next time they ooze through town. Heralded by a foreboding film noir string arrangement, **OXBOW [8]** slope onstage and lurch into a brisk, shit-kicking rendition of *The Geometry Of Business*. Now 30 years into a truly singular career, it's immediately clear that the band have lost none of their edge and none of their power, each careful composition coiling and uncoiling as they mix visceral immediacy and artful, abrasive abstraction while touching base with everything from jazz, metal and modern classical to the most fucked-up blues imaginable. Leaning hard on last year's masterful *Thin Black Duke* album, the band smoulder through cuts like *Letter Of Note* and *Host*, the quiet, pent-up power of the rhythm section rumbling steadily as guitarist Niko Wenner veers between limber, spider-fingered care and full-on rock god shape-throwing. Frontman Eugene Robinson, meanwhile does his *thing*, the gaffer tape on his ears lasting about as long as his handsome red suit as he chunters, croons and howls; presenting a towering stage presence that can snap effortlessly from swagger to sleeper hold. It seems perhaps pointed that the band ignore material from *An Evil Heat* – their 2002 'breakthrough' – and opt instead for deep-dives into their more obtuse 90s back catalogue, taking long, bitter draughts from both *King Of The Jews* and *Let Me Be A Woman*. This doesn't hamper a mesmeric performance, of course, and truth be told the idea of an Oxbow experience without some sort of goad, challenge or provocation isn't much of an Oxbow experience at all. After all, why settle for drab, comfortable familiarity when you can instead bear witness to all the ferocious violence, pain and majesty of life itself?

ALEX DELLER

SETLIST

The Geometry Of Business
Letter Of Note
Host
Cat And Mouse
Bomb
Cold And Well-Lit Place
A Gentleman's Gentleman
Sunday

ENCORE
1000

DEREK BREMNER

Broken Hope
CRYPTIC SHIFT/ CORPSING/ ANNUNCIATION
NEW CROSS INN, LONDON

Largely off today's (blast)beaten metal track, the New Cross Inn has a sense of devil-may-care community around it, with a loyal crowd losing their shit to every band on this all-DM bill. That's just as well for **ANNUNCIATION [5]**, whose rhythm section sounds like a malfunctioning washing machine drum. Leagues ahead in the precision stakes, **CORPSING [7]** unleash a barrage of blasts with just enough deference to dynamics after the tinny PA has done its worst to suggest there's some genuinely malicious intent within. For all their technical ability, **CRYPTIC SHIFT**'s **[5]** abstract excursions count for naught when their attempts at Gorguts-esque progression sound as aimless and half-baked as they do tonight. Unsurprisingly, Chicago veterans **BROKEN HOPE [8]** open up new dimensions of pacing, depth, constricting groove and innards-composting vocals as they induce yet more levels of pit mayhem with not a single riff wasted. A masterclass of mayhem.

JONATHAN SELZER

Slough Feg
SEVEN SISTERS
LOUNGE 666, LONDON

Sadly about to close, Archway's Lounge appears to have been untouched since the mid-80s and thus makes the perfect backdrop for **SEVEN SISTERS [7]**. Their recent second outing has seen them come on leaps and bounds with a sound that's Europe meets Dokken. With less spandex on show than usual, they're still a glorious riot of choruses and excessive guitar solos. **SLOUGH FEG [9]** are one of metal's best-kept secrets, with almost 30 years of their fiercely individual take on the genre that melds the 70s Celtic rock of Thin Lizzy and Horslips with the NWOBHM grunt of early Maiden. Frontman Mike Scalzi is suffering from a lurgy and sore throat yet still exudes serious rock star charisma and has more energy than a Duracell bunny. Tearing through deep cuts and an impassioned blast through Manilla Road's *Street Jammer* in tribute to Mark Shelton, the Bay Area metalheads are on fire. Proof yet again that, as the initiated already know, Slough Feg are one of the planet's best metal bands.

ALASTAIR RIDDELL

MARIE KORNER

"See that? That's the future. It's shit"

Mick Kenney and Dave Hunt conduct a trial run for Armageddon

Anaal Nathrakh
THE BLACK HEART, LONDON

Brummie marauders take Camden to hell and back

THERE'S ALWAYS BEEN an element of the sadistic to Anaal Nathrakh's all-out assault. The Black Heart strongly resembles some barbaric, militaristic oven tonight, and as the band emerge amid squalls of harrowing feedback and launch into the bombastic hate-storm of new song *Obscene As Cancer*, a chewable sense of cathartic euphoria fills the airless room. Two decades and 10 albums are well worth celebrating, of course, but this feels more like a collective vomiting of evil spirits than a party, as Dave Hunt spits out his nihilistic declarations, switching from guttural roar to operatic bellow to snarling oratory. Much like the band's records, standing anywhere near the eye of this storm is emotionally bruising but undeniably satisfying. Songs like the pitch-black *Monstrum In Animo* and *Depravity Favours The Bold* somehow punch even harder in the sweaty flesh, divested of their studio sheen, frayed edges and ambient noise, making each wall of blasts more impenetrable, each symphonic surge more thrillingly impactful. As chaos erupts in the pit and the ceiling starts to drip, Dave's typically sardonic demeanour begins to soften a little: it's clear that as much as they despise humanity, there is still great joy in getting it out of this band's collective system. Avidly delivering the hateful goods in these barbaric conditions and climaxing with a truly unhinged *Do Not Speak*, Anaal Nathrakh continue to provide metalheads with the ultimate excoriating detox.

8

DOM LAWSON

Sadistic Intent delve into the diabolical

Grave Miasma – with added plasma

Sadistic Intent
GRAVE MIASMA/DUNGEON
BOSTON MUSIC ROOM, TUFNELL PARK

A trans-Atlantic night of death and damnation

HOMETOWN SPEED DEMONS DUNGEON [6] are impressive to watch, but despite the vicious bouts of shredding and satisfying nosedives into broad, melodic chord progressions, the quartet's efforts in the former area suffer at the hands of the detail-dissolving sound quality. Equally, **GRAVE MIASMA**'s **[8]** performance takes time to flourish, as the London-based occult-steeped death metallers pull from a catalogue of EPs and 2013's full-length *Odori Sepulcrorum*. Once it does, however, the near-packed venue embarks on a harrowing adventure into sinister territories. The whorls of atmosphere-generating riffage come laced with drawn-out, doomy phrasing and myriad mosh-worthy moments ensue, conducted with confidence by frontman 'Y'. LA veterans **SADISTIC INTENT [8]** roam effortlessly across their versatile and exploratory death metal soundscape. Weighted chugfests cascade seamlessly into terrorising solos, with guitarists Rick Cortez and Ernesto Bueno giving the crowd's necks a fantastic workout as a pit emerges. *Existence* provides a particular highlight, with frontman Bay Cortez sidling up to his brother, arching back with head cocked to the sky to further accentuate the disturbing onslaught bellowing from the speakers. The siblings remain ever-comfortable with both the stage and each other, but after three decades of creating music together this should be no surprise. Closing with *Morbid Faith*, Sadistic Intent can rest assured that the post-show chatter is filled with nothing less than high praise.

LUKE MILNE

THE METAL TEST

Pitting your heroes against the test that really matters

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

MICHAEL AMOTT

ARCH ENEMY

Just pray your ex-wife doesn't read *Hammer*, Michael...

WHAT'S THE MOST ILLEGAL THING YOU'VE EVER DONE?

"That's hard, I don't want to own up to too much! When I was 15, me and my mates broke into our old school and trashed it. We broke TVs and stuff. It was fun to wreak havoc where you used to be a slave!" ✓

WHAT'S THE MOST METAL ALBUM YOU OWN?

"Oh, that's a tough one. I have a huge collection of vinyl from back when metal was *metal*! Manowar perfected it on *Into Glory Ride*. Manowar don't really put any other influences in there – it's just pure metal and you've gotta respect that." ✓

WHAT'S THE WORST INJURY YOU'VE EVER HAD?

"I broke my arm a couple of times biking before I was touring, but – this sounds lame – I got an inflammation on my Achilles' heel from jumping onstage. I was hobbling around like an old man for six months. My Achilles' heel is actually my Achilles' heel." ✗

WHAT'S THE MOST YOU'VE EVER BEEN SICK?

"I get terrible hangovers; I wake up full of regret, like I've slaughtered a family. But the worst sickness I've had was food poisoning on this tour. After a show I was taking a shower and started vomiting against the glass. We had a long drive on the bus that night and I didn't know how I was going to make it... it was coming out both ends. I had to ask the driver to stop and I was outside in a ditch in the rain, puking. The bus driver was smoking a fag, looking at me like I was shit." ✓

WHAT'S THE GROSSEST THING YOU'VE EVER HAD IN YOUR MOUTH?

"My ex-wife? No, that's a joke! I haven't eaten meat since I was 14, and sometimes when I accidentally eat meat it's pretty gross." ✗

WHAT'S THE WORST FIGHT YOU'VE EVER BEEN IN?

"We were playing this Italian squat and the audience were spitting at us, so I stopped and offered them out, but they grabbed my guitar and smashed it up. I grabbed the bass and opened up a guy's face. That's as ultraviolent as I've ever been." ✓

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU BLED?

"Just before tour when I was cutting vegetables. I zoned out and there was a lot of blood. You can't play when you've cut your fingertips." ✗

WHAT'S THE RAREST PIECE OF MERCHANDISE YOU OWN?

"I'm a real pack rat; I have kept everything from my career – all the laminates, posters, pictures... everything. I never sell anything, so I've probably got something rare." ✗

WHAT'S YOUR MOST PAINFUL TATTOO OR PIERCING?

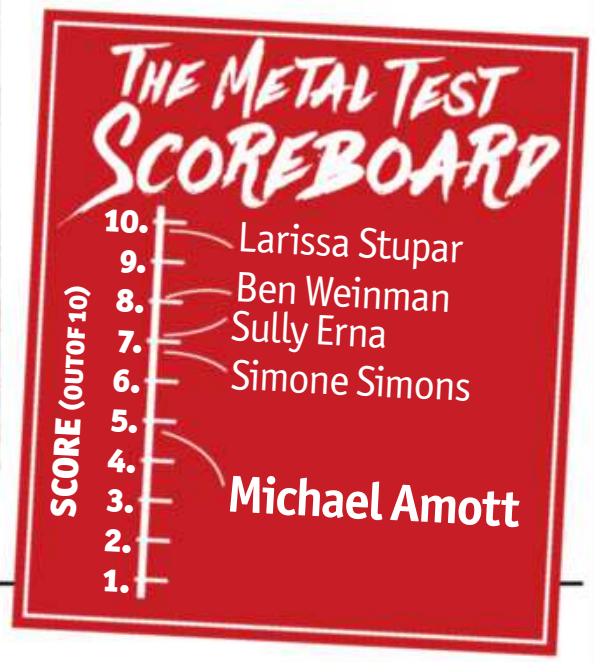
"I don't have any of either. It's mainstream now, so I feel like I'm more underground to not have any." ✗

WHAT'S THE MOST METAL PHOTO ON YOUR PHONE?

"I've toured with Maiden and Slayer and Megadeth and Dio, but I'm bad with taking pictures. I do have a photo of me and Dave Mustaine together on stage at Hellfest last month, that's pretty f'n cool." ✓

FINAL SCORE: 5/10. A middling score, but that sick story is truly gross.

ARCH ENEMY'S *WILL TO POWER* IS OUT NOW VIA CENTURY MEDIA



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